Sulfur 11

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POEMS 1940—1949 BY CHARLES OLSON

ELIOT WEINBERGER ON ANTI-SEMITISM IN AMERICAN POETRY

CONJUNCTIONS : 6

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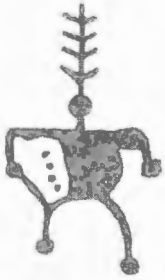

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CONTENTS

A SPECIAL SECTION ON PAUL CELAN

Edited by Jerry Glenn

JERRY GLENN: *Instead Of An Introduction* 5

PAUL CELAN:

Three Poems (Tr. by Beth Bjorklund) 8

Seven Poems (Tr. by Esther Cameron) 9

Three Poems (Tr. by Katharine Washburn) 16

The Second Cycle of Zeitgehöft (Tr. by Pierre Joris) 17

Three Letters (Tr. by Jerry Glenn) 27

MILO DOR: *Paul Celan* 32

HANS-JURGEN HEISE: *Paul Celan* 36

HANS RICHTER: *On Paul Celan* 44

JOHN FELSTINER: *Paul Celan's Triple Exile* 47

GOTZ WIENOLD: *Celan* 53

ESTHER CAMERON: *The Distant Earth: Celan's Planetary Vision* 61

RICHARD EXNER: *Paul Celan's* Atemwende 71

JED RASULA: *Paul Celan* 82

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN: *A Note On Paul Celan* 85

ERICH ARENDT: *Jewish Cemetery In Prague* 89

ROSE AUSLANDER: *In Memoriam Paul Celan* 91

HEINZ CZECHOWSKI: *Oradea* 92

HANS-JURGEN HEISE: *Paul Celan* 94

ARNO REINFRANK: *Lament For Paul Celan* 95

ANNEMARIE ZORNACK: *Paul Celan* 96

GISELE CELAN-LESTRANGE: *Three Engravings* 97

JOHANNES POETHEN: *Orpheus* 100

JOHN YAU: *The Drawings of Porfirio DiDonna* 103

PORFIRIO DIDONNA: *Four Drawings* 106

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN: *Untitled* 110

GEORGE F. BUTTERICK: *Editing Postmodern Texts* 113

From THE COLLECTED POEMS OF CHARLES OLSON:
1940-49 (Edited by George F. Butterick) 141

NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS: Weinberger on Pound after Torrey; Byrd on Learned Ignorance and Other Defenses; Perloff on "Dirty" Language and Scramble Systems; Silliman on Dahlen; Schelling on Stein and American Buddhism; Levi Strauss on Shurin; Kleinzahler on Rakosi's Prose; Clifford on Oneirography; Mackey on Brathwaite; McGarry on Fredman 158

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Re. the new Sulfur logo, Ann Dubois writes:
"Quite possibly this figure is an *ali'i* (ruler) or an ancestral spirit guardian (*aumakua*).
It is to be found on the Big Island (Hawaii) where most of the
discovered petroglyphs in The Islands are."

Photo credit: Wolfgang Oschatz

A SPECIAL SECTION ON PAUL CELAN

EDITED BY JERRY GLENN

INSTEAD OF AN INTRODUCTION

Paul Celan needs no "introduction" to the readers of SULFUR, or to anyone with a serious interest in contemporary poetry. He has been hailed as the most significant poet of his generation, and in certain circles he has become almost a cult figure. For the most part, however, American readers have had to rely not only on translations of his poems, but also, when they sought critical works to sharpen their understanding, on essays by English-speaking writers (whose knowledge of Celan, at least in some instances, was itself based solely on translations). Our purpose, then, is to add to the body of Celan's work available in English—none of the letters and only two of the poems published here have previously appeared in translation—and to offer, in the form of essays, as well as poems by German authors dedicated to Celan, a sampling of international views of this writer, who is no less enigmatic than he is important and admired. The essays, unless otherwise noted, are previously unpublished. The contributors include:

Erich Arendt, a resident of Berlin (German Democratic Republic),

and one of that country's most respected poets.

Rose Ausländer, like Celan a Jewish native of Czernowitz; the recipient of several poetry prizes, she now lives in Dusseldorf (Federal Republic of Germany).

Beth Bjorklund, who has published numerous translations of modern Austrian poetry, and who served as guest editor and translator of a special Austrian number of *The Literary Review.*

Esther Cameron, since 1979 a resident of Israel, where a collection of her poetry in Hebrew translation recently appeared; she would like to hear from others interested in Celan, and can be reached at: Rechov Shmorak 10, Jerusalem 96546.

Heinz Czechowski, the author of numerous volumes of poetry, as well as translations and essays, and a resident of Leipzig (GDR).

Milo Dor, an Austrian novelist born in Budapest, who was a friend of Celan from 1948 until the latter's death; this essay originally appeared in German in 1970.

Clayton Eshleman, whose essay was first published in *Studies in 20th Century Literature* (1983).

Richard Exner, Professor of German at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the author of numerous studies of modern German literature, and a highly respected (German) poet; this essay was presented, in German, at the 1983 meeting of the Modern Language Association, and the informal style has been intentionally retained.

John Felstiner, Professor of English at Stanford University, whose areas of interest include translation and Holocaust literature; this essay is a slightly modified version of a paper presented at the 1983 meeting of the American Literary Translators Association.

Jerry Glenn, Professor of German at the University of Cincinnati, whose publications include *Paul Celan* (New York: Twayne, 1973).

Hans-Jürgen Heise, West-German poet and essayist, whose most recent collection was called by the North-German Radio "the most significant literary publication" of 1983; the essay is an abridgment of one originally published in German.

Pierre Joris, a poet from Luxembourg, who has also translated books by Duprey, Bataille, and Tazara into English, and Kerouac, Corso, and Eshleman into French.

Jed Rasula, an American poet whose contribution originally appeared in *Studies in 20th Century Literature* (1983).

Arno Reinfrank, a Jewish writer now living in London whose works include dramas and prose fiction as well as some twenty collections of poetry.

Hans Richter, Professor of German at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena (GDR), the author of several studies of modern German literature; this essay is excerpted from an article scheduled to appear in *Österreichische Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts: Einzeldarstellungen,* Berlin (GDR), Verlag Volk und Wissen (Prod. No. 102593).

Carl Clifton Toliver, whose translations of Marie Luise Kaschnitz and Elisabeth Plessen have appeared in Dimension.

Suzanne Shipley Toliver, who has published translations of Erich Arendt, Christa Reinig, and others, as well as a book on Arendt.

Katharine Washburn, the editor of the forthcoming Random House *Anthology of Twentieth-Century German Poetry,* whose publications include translations of Ingeborg Bachmann, Johannes Bobrowski, and Celan.

Götz Wienold, Professor of Linguistics and Comparative Literature at the University of Konstanz (Federal Republic of Germany), whose publications reflect a wide range of interests, including Celan.

Annemarie Zornack, the wife of Hans-Jürgen Heise and author of several volumes of poetry, whose next collection will be issued by the Eremiten-Presse in 1985.

We would like to thank the authors of the poems in the concluding section, which appeared in 1971 in the German journal *Die Horen,* for granting permission to publish the translations. Celan's poems are published with the permission of the copyright holders: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt for "Argumentum e silentio" from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle;* S. Fischer Verlag for "Les Globes" from *Die Niemandsrose;* Persea Books for "The Trumpet's Part" and "The Poles"; and Suhrkamp Verlag for the remaining poems, from *Atemwende, Fadensonnen, Lichtzwang, Schneepart,* and *Zeitgehöft* (the source is indicated below each individual translation).

JERRY GLENN

THREE POEMS

Tr. by Beth Bjorklund

PALE-VOICED, flayed
from the depths:
no word, no thing,
and of both the sole name,

suited for fall in you,
suited for flight in you,

wounded gain
of a world.

(From *Lichtzwang*)

CHALK-CROCUS, at
dawn: your
warrant-ripened
from-there-and-also-there-from,
indivisible,

explosives
smile at you,
the indentation Being
helps a flake
out of itself,

the Moldau rises
in the mine-vaults.

STONE-BLOW behind the beetles.
There I saw someone who didn't lie,
standing home into his despair.

Like your loneliness-storm
he succeeds with the wide-
stepping-out stillness.

(From *Schneepart*)

SEVEN POEMS

Tr. by Esther Cameron

ARGUMENTUM E SILENTIO

for René Char

Chained between gold and oblivion:
the night.
Both stretched hands out to grasp her.
Both she allowed.

Lay down, you too, lay down
in this place, whatever is trying to dawn
upward, abreast of the days:
the word overflown by stars,
washed over by seas.

To each his word.
To each that word which sang to him
when the pack attacked from behind:
to each that word which sang to him and congealed.

To her, to the night,
the one overflown by stars, washed over by seas,
the one hauled in by silence,
whose blood did not clot when the venom-tooth
bit through the syllables.

To her the word caught by silence.

Against those others, whored round
by hangmen's ears, which also
make haste to scale time and the times,
it will bear witness, at the last,
when only chains ring out,
it will bear witness for her, who lies there
between gold and oblivion,
sistered to both, from all time—

For where
is there sign of dawn, say, save with her,
who in the river-basin of her tears
shows the seed to submerging suns,
time, time and again?

(From *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*)

LES GLOBES

In the eyes that have lost their way—read there:
The sun-, the heart-trajectories, the
In-vain whizzing beautifully past.
The deaths and all
that is born of them. The
chain of generations
that lies buried here and
still hangs here, in the ether,
bordering abysses. The inscriptions
on all those faces, drilled in
by singing word-sand—Tiny Eternity,
syllables.

All this,
even the heaviest, was
fledged, nothing
held back.

(From *Die Niemandsrose*)

NO HAND holds me either, I was born as you were,
and none flings fortune into my hour, any more than into yours,
who were dipped, as I was, in bull's blood,

yet the numbers stand ready to light the way for the tear
which is shot into the world
out of our navel,

yet that which came close to us, singly,
goes into the great syllabic writing,

and the almond-testicle
storms
and blossoms.

(From *Atemwende*)

WHITE, white, white
as picket-whitewash
the Laws line up
and march
inward.

FRANKFURT, SEPTEMBER

Blind, light-
bearded partition.
A lady-bug dream
shines on it, searching.

Behind, in keened
photogravure,
Freud's forehead opens out,

the hard-silenced
tear outside
crystallizes with the sentence:
"For the last
time psycho-
logy."

The simulated
jackdaw
eats breakfast.

The glottal stop
sings.

THE SCOOPED-OUT HEART,
where feeling is being installed.

Greater Homeland
Prefabricatedparts.

Milk-sister
Shovel.

THE INDUSTRIOUS
natural resources, domestic,

the heated syncope,

the indecipherable
Year of Reverberation,

the fully-vitrified
spider-altars in the all-
overtowering one-story building,

the intermediate tones
(even yet?),
the shadow-palaver,

the dreads, ice-oriented,
flight-clear,

the baroquely-draped,
language-swallowing shower-room,
semantically illuminated,

the uninscribed wall
of a phone-cell:

here

live yourself

straight across, without a clock.

(From *Fadensonnen*)

THREE POEMS

Tr. by Katharine Washburn

BLUE OF THE LODES in your mouth
you gasp up pole after pole

snow summered over
throws itself on it

soon the starling staggers hangs
in the double swarm of songs.

ONCE, when death was mobbed,
you took shelter in me.

GONE INTO THE NIGHT, complicit,
a star-
porous leaf
instead of a mouth:

something remains
for wild wasting,
treeward.

(From *Lichtzwang*)

THE SECOND CYCLE OF ZEITGEHÖFT

Tr. by Pierre Joris

ALMONDING YOU, who only halfspoke,
yet was trembled from the seed on up,
you
I let wait,
you.

And was
not yet
uneyed,
as yet unthorned in the song's
star, the song that begins:
Hachnissini.

IT STOOD
on your lip: the figsplinter

it stood
around us: Jerusalem

it stood
above the Daneship:
the bright-fir-scent, we thanked it,

I stood
in you.

THE SWELTER
adds us up
in the ass's bray before
Absalom's tomb, here too,

Gethsemane, over there,
the shirked, whom
does it bury?

At the nearest gate nothing opens,

above you, open one, I carry you toward me.

WE, WHO LIKE THE SEAOATS GUARD,
in N'we Awiwim,

the unkissed
stone of a complaint
swells up,
before fulfillment

it palpates our mouths,
it crosses
over to us,

alloyed to us
is its Whiteness,

we hand ourselves on:
to you and to me,

the night, be careful, the sand—
commanded,
is strict
with us two.

A RING, FOR BOWDRAWING,
sent after the wordswarm
that founders behind the world,
with the starlings,

Arrowy one, when you whir toward me,
I know from where,

I forgot from where.

THE RADIANCE, yes, the one that
Abu Tor
saw riding toward us, when we
orphaned into each other, for life,
not only up from the wrists—:

a goldbuoy, from
temple-depths,
surveyed the danger that
slyly underlay us.

NITIDOUS YOU
tumor daughter
of a blinding in the cosmos,

seized
by supracelestial search troops
shunted
into the seeing, god-
forsaking
starheap Blue,

you turn
gamey
before our
hungry, immovable
pores,
an also-sun, between
two brightshots'
abyss.

COME, lay the world out with yourself,
come, let me fill you both up with
all that's mine,

One with you I am,
to capture us,

even now.

A BOOTFUL OF BRAIN
set out in the rain:

there will be a going, a great one,
far across the borders
they draw for us.

THE TRUMPET'S PART
deep in the glowing
Empty-text,
at lamp's level,
in the timehole:

listen your way in
mouthwise.

THE POLES
are in us,
insurmountable
while awake,
we sleep across, to the Gate
of Mercy,

I lose you to you, that
is my snow-comfort,

say that Jerusalem *is,*

say it, as if I were this
your Whiteness,
as if you were
mine,

as if without us we could be we

I leaf you open, forever,

you pray, you lay
us free.

THE KINGSWAY behind the false door,

before it, deathed
in by the counter-
sign, the lionsign,

the constellation, keel up,
mired in,

you, with the
wound-fathoming
eyelash.

THERE ALSO comes a meaning
down the narrower cut,

it is breached
by the deadliest of our
standing marks.

I DRINK WINE from two different glasses
and harrow
the King's caesura
like that other
does Pindar.

God hands in the tuning fork
as one of the small
just ones,

from the lottery drum falls
our doit.

SOMETHING SHALL be, later,
that fills itself with you
and lifts itself
to a mouth

Out of shattered
madness

I raise myself
and watch my hand
as it draws the one
single
circle

NOTHINGNESS, for the sake
of our names
—they gather us in—
seals,

the end believes us
the beginning,

before the
masters en-
silencing us,
in the undifferentiated, attesting
itself: the clammy
brightness.

IN THE BELLSHAPE the
believing-unbelieving
souls gasp,

star-nonsense
propagates itself, even with my
hand, in desert-sense en-
duned by you,

we got here
long ago.

AS I carry the ringshadow
you carry the ring,

something, used to heaviness,
strains itself
lifting us,
infinite
de-eternalizing you.

STRANGENESS
has netted us,
transience reaches
helplessly through us,

take my pulse, it too,
into yourself,

then we shall prevail
against you, against me,

something enclothes us
in dayskin, in nightskin,
for the game with the highest, epi-
leptic Seriousness.

ILLUMINATED, the seeds
which I in you
won swimming,

rowed free,
the names—they
sail the straits,

a blessing, up front,
compacts into
a weather-sensing
fist.

THREE LETTERS

Tr. and edited by Jerry Glenn

The first two selections consist of excerpts from letters written by Celan to Alfred Margul-Sperber, one from Vienna, where Celan spent approximately the first six months of 1948, and the second while en route to Paris. Margul-Sperber (1898-1967) was born in a small town in the Bukovina. After the First World War he settled in Czernowitz, Celan's home town, where he established a reputation as a poet and translator and came to be recognized as the leading figure of the German-speaking literary community. He became Celan's friend and mentor, and it was through his influence that Celan was immediately accepted by the Viennese literary elite in 1948, as Milo Dor relates in his contribution to the present issue of SULFUR. After WW II Margul-Sperber moved to Bucharest, where he remained active until his death. He was one of a small and select group of people who enjoyed Celan's respect and friendship throughout his life. These and other letters of Celan to Margul-Sperber were published in the Rumanian journal *Neue Literatur* in 1975.

The third selection, previously unpublished, is presented in its entirety. Celan, widely recognized today as one of the outstanding poetic translators of his generation, did a number of translations in the 1950s, after settling in Paris, for the primary purpose of earning money. One book he was asked to translate was *Rainer Maria Rilke/André Gide: Correspondence 1909-1926,* edited and introduced by Renée Lang, and published by Editions Corrèa, Paris, in 1952. As this letter to Professor Lang reveals, Celan ultimately decided against accepting the assignment. The book was eventually translated by Wolfgang A. Peters (with considerable—unacknowledged—assistance from Lang) and appeared in German in 1957, issued jointly by two publishers: the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, which had put out another of Lang's books—a study of Gide—in 1953, was Celan's publisher at the time, and held the German rights to Gide; and the Insel Verlag, Rilke's publisher.

I would like to express my gratitude to Renée Lang for making the third letter available to me and providing information about its contents,

and to Gisèle Celan-Lestrange for granting permission to publish all three letters.

Vienna I, Rathausstrasse 20
Feb. 11, 1948

Dear Mr. Sperber,

. . . It seemed as though there was little likelihood that my book of poetry would be published. I was, to be sure, heartened by the fact that a selection of my poems (about fifteen—a substantial number) appeared—or will appear next Friday—in "Plan." But then nothing happened. . . . Edgar Jené, however, invited some people to his apartment and I read my poems, which were highly praised. Believe me, I can't tell you how happy it made me to hear them say that I was the greatest poet in Austria and—as far as they knew—in Germany. One of the people who said that was Dr. Werner Riemerschmid. For years he was in charge of the literary division of the Austrian Radio, even under the Nazis, and back then I imagine he found other ways to spend his time than saying to a Jewish poet: "At last the *homo alpinus* can see what a poet is."

But Edgar Jené is different, he has really been exceptionally nice to me. . . . He is, as it were, the "pope" of Viennese surrealism, and I am now his most influential (and only) cardinal. I have, to be sure, prophesied to him that is superior, St. Peter, that is, Andre Breton, . . . will categorically refuse to recognize me, a person who has done something as abominable as write rhymed poetry. Jené is now preparing an issue of "Plan" devoted to surrealism, which he intends to take with him to Paris in April (A. Breton has sent material for the issue, I have supplied a translation of a short poem by Aimé Césaire and an "apologia," co-authored by Jené), along with my book. Yes, my book . . . went to the printer today and will be out in five or six weeks. . . .

An anecdote from the early history of the publication of my poems: a publisher, Mrs. Luckmann, who heard me read my poems at Jené's, was so enthusiastic that she immediately declared her intention to publish them without subvention. But a few days later, after she had taken the manuscript home, she reconsidered, because her editor and one of her

authors, P. Gütersloh, said that the time for publishing these admittedly "very talented" poems had "not yet come." Dark times indeed....

Sincerely,
Paul

---

my book: Der Sand aus den Urnen ("The Sand from the Urns"), published late in 1948 by A. Sexl in Vienna; the time schedule mentioned here by Celan proved to be quite optimistic.

Plan: progressive Viennese literary magazine edited by Otto Basil (1901-83). Financial difficulties caused the journal to cease publication after the issue in which Celan's poems were presented, and the surrealism issue never appeared.

Edgar Jené (born 1904): a surrealist painter and art editor of *Plan,* and Celan's closest friend in Vienna; cf. Celan's essay "Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream," tr. Jerry Glenn, *Boston University Journal,* 21, No. 1 (1973), pp. 63-68.

Werner Riemerschmid (1875-1967): Austrian author and translator.

André Breton (1896-1954): French poet and novelist, and the leading theoretician of surrealism.

Aimé Césaire (born 1913): French surrealist poet born in Martinique, and a friend of Breton.

apologia: "Eine Lanze," a short surrealistic prose text, which was mimeographed and distributed in conjunction with a poetry reading and art exhibition in Vienna on April 3rd, 1948.

Mrs. Luckmann: Ilse Luckmann, Viennese publisher of, among others, Gütersloh and Heimito von Doderer (1896-1966).

P. Gütersloh: Alfred Paris Gütersloh (1887-1973), Austrian artist and writer.

Innsbruck, July 6, 1948

Dear Mr. Sperber,

Yesterday I visited Ludwig von Ficker. It was not easy for me to read my poetry for Trakl's friend. Ficker getting on in years—he'll be seventy in two years—and in such cases one often suspects that a friendship with a poet like Trakl limits the person's receptivity to other poets ...so I was prepared for a less enthusiastic reception than I hoped for.

You can imagine how happy I was when it turned out quite differently, in spite of the fact that I didn't read as effectively as I did on many occasions in Vienna (and I read much better now than formerly)—I was nervous, and Ficker is hard of hearing. I was told that I was called to be the heir of Lasker-Schüler. At first I didn't know how to respond, since—I'm ashamed to say—I don't feel nearly as close to Lasker-Schüler as to Trakl and Eluard, and also because I didn't know what Ficker's opinion of her poetry was. But then Ficker took her last collection of poems from his desk... and from the way he spoke about her I could tell that he esteemed her as highly as Trakl. He also voiced the opinion that Trakl himself was deeply indebted to her. And he talked to me as if I were one of them. I was especially pleased that he was attuned to the Jewish element in my poetry—you know how important this is to me....

Sincerely,
Paul

Ludwig von Ficker: Ficker (1880-1967), the editor of the Austrian journal *Der Brenner,* a friend of Trakl and the person responsible for Trakl's literary fame.

Trakl: Georg Trakl (1887-1914), Austrian expressionist poet.

Lasker-Schüler: Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945), German-Jewish writer best known for her lyrics, and an important forerunner of expressionism.

Eluard: Paul Eluard (1895-1952), French surrealist poet.

Paris, August 27, 1954

Dear Madam:

I had no choice—I simply had to return your book to the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. Originally I had hoped to find a style in translating the Rilke letters that would allow me to avoid reproducing all of the idiosyncrasies of Rilke's idiom, without, of course, ignoring the essence of his poetic voice in the process. I had put off doing these letters, intending to translate them only after reading and re-reading Rilke's German letters. Unfortunately, however, a problem arose, in the form of the Insel Ver-

lag's perfectly legitimate request to see some of my translations of the Rilke letters. This intimidated me. I saw myself subjected to the scrutiny of the entire congregation of Rilke worshippers, whose familiarity with Rilke's language far surpasses my own. As you well know, Rilke's French inhabits a realm that is determined by displacements and reductions. This language can't simply be translated, it must be *translocated.* The publisher's request caused me to question my ability to feel my way into the language, my ability to execute such an analogous linguistic operation to the extent demanded by the text. My desire to hear the opinion of the Insel Verlag after the completion of my work was equalled by my fear to begin.

I have hesitated for an unpardonably long time, translating and retranslating—with the unfortunate result that my doubts increased with each attempt.

Your book is now back at the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt and will, I hope, soon be in hands that, unlike mine, find no need to page endlessly through Rilke's German works before deciding to use this word or that; in hands that can replace a semicolon with a period without hesitation.

It is with a deep sense of shame and sadness that I inform you of the situation. Please believe me when I say that I have the best interests of your book at heart.

Sincerely yours,
Paul Celan

---

translated... translocated: *ubersetzt... übergesetzt*: both German words are translations of the components of the Latin *transferre,* with a minor grammatical difference; the former is used figuratively, 'to translate,' the latter in the physical sense of 'to carry across.'

PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Joachim Herrmann and Rebecca S. Rodgers

In 1947 a young man who called himself Paul Celan appeared in Vienna. He came literally from Nowhere. He was born Paul Antschel on November 23, 1920, in Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, an erstwhile Austrian province whose educated Jewish population spoke German. But where was Czernowitz now? On which map could it be found? Who lived there now, and what language did they speak?

In 1938 Paul Antschel travelled to France to study, as did the sons of many good Rumanian families. But a year later, in the summer of 1939, he abandoned his medical studies at Tours and returned home to commence the study of Romance languages and literatures. After the war reached eastern Europe, he spent a year in a detention camp. Following his escape he made his way to the Soviet army, where they put the former medical student to work as an orderly. In 1944 he returned with the Soviets to Rumania. Czernowitz now belonged to the Ukrainian S.S.R., to which it had been ceded by the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939. Paul's parents were no longer there. They had been carried off and murdered by the Germans.

In 1945 he took a job as culture-page editor of a Rumanian newspaper. During this time he secretly composed poems in German, which was at once his mother tongue and the language of his mother's murderers. The future of a German poet in Rumania was not particularly promising, however, since German was not held in very high esteem there in the early post-war years—as if the language of Heine and Rilke should be blamed for the fact that the Nazis had also used it (and, of course, abused it).

And so the young man, who had now assumed the name Paul Celan, departed for Vienna, which he regarded as the Mecca of German

literary life. Among his meager possessions was the manuscript of a book of poems, as well as a letter from Alfred Margul-Sperber, a respected older poet. The letter was addressed to Otto Basil, the editor of the first post-war Austrian literary magazine, which bore the significant title of *Plan*.

As the opening selection of the last issue of his magazine, which appeared in the spring of 1948, Basil featured seventeen poems by Paul Celan. In a note at the end he printed an excerpt from Margul-Sperber's letter:

> Without meaning to anticipate your more competent judgement, I would like to tell you that Paul Celan is *the* poet of our region, the poet whom I have been awaiting for decades and who has richly rewarded my patience. Celan has lived exclusively here in Rumania, that is, in a non-German-speaking environment. But his poetry seems to demonstrate that there exists a sublime spirit of language, independent of day-to-day discourse. His work impresses me as the most distinctive and striking being produced by the latest generation of German poets. It is not, however, easily accessible; it demands of the reader an exceptional degree of receptivity, sensitivity, and perseverance. Not only do the events in his poetry transpire in a mythic realm—the light that shines therein seems almost to originate in another spectrum—but poetic reality itself is also transfigured. It is, so to speak, the sun of this reality which we encounter. The Emotional, the Sonorous, the Visionary: everything must be viewed from a different perspective. The association is the association of Dream, which explores new territories, including those of a linguistic nature. I, for my part, believe that *Der Sand aus den Urnen* ("The Sand from the Urns") is the most important book of German verse to have been produced in recent decades, and the only poetic equal of the works of Kafka.

In that same year (1948), *Der Sand aus den Urnen* was published in Vienna. As was so often the case in those days, it was printed on bad paper, had an ugly cover, and was full of misprints. Nevertheless, Paul Celan made an incisive impression on the Viennese literary public of the early post-war years. When he gave a reading in the Agathon Gallery, the room was filled to overflowing. But what did that matter at a time when the circles in which he moved were living from hand to mouth and would have liked nothing better than to emigrate, had they had the chance. So-called serious people, those engaged in politics and business, had little time for upstart poets who suddenly appeared and claimed a right to

exist. This remains true in Vienna, even today, in 1970.

Paul Celan moved to Paris, where he completed his studies and earned a meager living as a teacher of language and literature. In the spring of 1949 I visited him there. He was still a student at the time, and lived on the top floor of a small hotel in the Rue des Ecoles. I slept on the sofa in his small room, and we spent three wonderful weeks together, during which we actually began to entertain the ridiculous hope that even in Vienna things might one day improve, thus making his return possible. He maintained a strange sort of loyalty to Vienna, as to a homeland that he had lost and wanted one day to find again.

In 1951 Reinhard Federmann, Hans Weigel, and I printed a handful of Celan's poems in our anthology *Stimmen der Gegenwart,* to demonstrate that he belonged among the first post-war generation of Austrian writers. And he did. Where else did he belong? At the urging of the Austrian branch of the "Group 47," or, more precisely, at the urging of Ingeborg Bachmann, Reinhard Federmann, and myself, Celan was invited to the group's meeting in Niendorf, near Hamburg, in the spring of 1952. He didn't receive the Group 47 prize—this honor went to Ilse Aichinger. Immediately after the reading, however, he located a German publisher, who brought out *Mohn und Gedächtnis* ("Poppy and Memory"), a collection of poetry, in the fall of that year. Recognition in West Germany soon followed.

While German intellectuals were debating whether or not it was possible to write poetry after Auschwitz, this young man, who had been spared Auschwitz only by a coincidence, wrote poems full of somber tones and an awe-inspiring power that can only emanate from someone who has lived on the threshhold of death. He was quite capable of mourning, perhaps even for the murderers of his parents, relatives, and playmates—whose Czernowitz had ceased to exist.

He was not, however, prepared to live in Germany, although some changes had taken place there, but preferred to live in a sort of voluntary exile. In West Germany, several of his books appeared and much was written about him; he was praised, and honored with prestigious literary prizes. But Paul Celan remained in Paris. Exile retains its meaning only so long as one can hope for return. Yet what place should a German-speaking poet born in Czernowitz return to? If he had begun to write in

French immediately after his arrival in Paris, he would certainly, like Ionesco, have quickly become one of the voices setting the tone of cultural life in the French metropolis. But what was he doing there, a poet who obstinately continued to write in German?

In 1959, shortly after his *Sprachgitter* ("Language Lattice") had appeared in Frankfurt, Paul Celan telephoned me. He called not from Paris, but from Vienna. He had abruptly decided to come because he had felt the need to hear the sound of German being spoken in the streets. He stayed here for a week, and we discussed, among other things, ways in which his eventual return to Vienna might be arranged. Carried away by my love of the city, I believed that I could manage, through some connection or other, to find him a place to live, even if only in welfare housing, and a job with a modest but regular salary. After all, he had a phenomenal mastery of several languages—he spoke Russian and English in addition to French and Rumanian—so it shouldn't have been difficult to find him suitable employment. But we forgot to take into account that he was a great poet, and great poets are not readily accepted here, whatever else they might be doing.

After Celan left, I seriously considered making a determined effort to bring him to Vienna. But then I became painfully aware that I myself lived in a vacuum in which I was incapable of doing anything to help someone else. The only thing I could do was publish thirteen of his poems in my anthology *Die Verbannten.* In the preface I wrote about our helplessness in an environment where mediocre dilettantes set the tone. This was the only tangible product of our conversation. I continued to discuss Celan here and there with a few friends who themselves were incapable of doing anything to help anyone else. Two years ago, in 1968, he was finally invited to give a reading in Vienna. I very much looked forward to seeing him again, and I went to the Palais Pallfy—but Paul Celan never came. Several hundred interested or curious people went away disappointed. I think that by then it was already too late.

The fate of Paul Celan is renewed proof that Austria has only dead or exiled poets. He is dead now, and has finally found a way to return to a realm in which his language is understood.

PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Linda Kraus Worley and Jeff Worley

Paul Antschel, who used the pen name Paul Celan, was born in Czernowitz on November 23, 1920—one year after his homeland, Bukovina, was ceded to Rumania. In 1940 the northern part of the area, including the capital, Czernowitz, was annexed by the Soviet Union, and a year later the situation changed again: German and Rumanian troops occupied the country. Although his Jewish parents met their death in a concentration camp, their son survived in a Rumanian work camp. Finally, towards the end of 1943, he was able to return to Czernowitz and continue the study of Romance languages and literatures he had begun in 1939 following a stay in France. Another disruptive event in Celan's life occurred in 1945 after Bukovina was annexed by the Soviet Union once and for all: his deportation to Rumania. After working as a translator and publisher's reader in Bucharest for two years, the young poet reached Paris after a stay in Vienna, where his first book, *Der Sand aus den Urnen* ("The Sand from the Urns") appeared in 1948. In Paris he married the artist Gisèle Lestrange and began to work as a translator after a short course of studies in German and linguistics at the Sorbonne. He also assembled a collection of old and new poems, which he entitled *Mohn und Gedächtnis* ("Poppy and Memory," 1952).

The most successful poems in this volume reveal a decidedly modern author, if one still bound to a conventional vocabulary. He achieves this modernity by providing a musical structure for the emotional content, using his own surrealistic associative technique. To be sure, Celan turns to the past, to the atrocities of the war and the murder of his parents in some of his poems, including the all-too rhetorical "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue"). But in most of the poems the elegiac mood is thematically divorced from what might have caused it. It is life—but life as a

whole, life in the totality of its ontological relationships—that causes suffering. History, civilization, technology, class struggle—none of these is a significant factor in Celan's lyrics. Celan suffers from the daily banalities of life around him and the deep loneliness within him; and since everything becomes unfamiliar and painful, even love itself cannot offer refuge.

Even if Celan still appears to be relatively "open" in *Mohn und Gedächtnis,* to be concerned with people and things, he is already building around himself those barriers of reserve and ceremoniousness behind which he will later construct his hermetic fortress. An external frame of reference is no longer a goal; it is merely a point of departure for the poetic word, which leads away from mankind, down towards the dark, death-filled vessels, towards an epigram similar in its severity to that epitaph which Rilke composed for himself in 1925, as a means of withdrawing from the company of mankind: "Rose, oh pure paradox, desire/To be no one's sleep under so many/Lids."

This cool formulation often shines through Celan's work from this point on. "Nobody's voice, again," to cite a line from *Sprachgitter* ("Language Lattice," 1959). In *Fadensonnen* ("Thread-Suns," 1968), a poem cramped in painful isolation appears: "The high-world—lost, the madness-journey, the day-journey.//What can be asked, from this point,/with the rose in a fallow year/No-where, interpreted home." The most striking signs, however, that point to Rilke's epitaph are found in *Die Niemandsrose* ("The No One's Rose," 1963), which pays homage to its model not only overtly in the title, but also in the poems: "...no one's/root—oh, ours...," "No one kneads us again out of earth and clay/no one blesses our dust./No one.//...A Nothing/we were, we are, we will stay/a Nothing, blooming:/the Nothing's, the No-one's rose." This metaphorical material, however, is given an essentially different meaning in the lines of the last quote, since what was in Rilke narcissism, the ethically unconcerned attitude of the artist, suddenly becomes in Celan a cipher that establishes bonds with the collective.

Die Niemandsrose was Celan's most heterogeneous book. Here the poet reaches back once more to an outworn romantic vocabulary; even though he avoids the all-too-arbitrary genitive metaphors common in the early poems, he now allows constructions which are almost more obso-

lete and sugary to creep in: pistil bright as souls, stamen empty as heaven, grey-beaten heart-hammer-silver. Even rhyme suddenly appears again. Although in a poem like "Selbdritt, selbviert" ("The Three of Us, the Four of Us"), which is deliberately reminiscent of Hans Arp, rhyme has a legitimate parodistic function, in other poems it appears to be a regression, an attempt to hold together all of the unrhymed elements of today with the formal structure of yesterday.

There is no doubt that Celan enters into a crisis with *Niemandsrose,* a crisis that could in no way have been foreseen after the concise texts of *Sprachgitter.* The feeling, the fear, the despair—all of those elements which had also been present in works like "Sommerbericht ("Summer Report") and "Engführung" ("The Straitening") but had been artistically perfected and thereby, at least to some degree, neutralized—emerge now once again: the eruptive and chaotic grasping at old forms and searching for new ones, without finding them. *Sprachgitter* presents the lyrical protocol of a life which, even though it fails to capture reality, has, nevertheless, in the realm of the verbal been able to give expression to its failure so that this life, after all, does succeed—albeit in an indirect way. In "Jakobs Stimme" ("Jacob's Voice"), a poetic fragment from the introductory cycle "Stimmen" ("Voices"), his frustration is conquered; these verses lend dignity to suffering, but they still point back to life: "The tears./The tears in the brother's eye./One hung there, grew./ We live in it./Breathe, that/it may loosen."

For the most part, however, the poems in *Sprachgitter* deal with a world wherein the lines of communication are destroyed: the world is something that separates. All that remains to do is to report what has already transpired. The isolation seems complete; there is no succor, no hope, no future: "Go, your hour/has no sisters, you are—/are at home .../...the night/needs no stars, nowhere/are you asked for." All human beings, even lovers, have drifted apart. The self-evident, because it is not self-evident anymore, emerges as something uncertain, something divisive. To be sure, every once in a while a penetrating perception occurs, but then, when confidence arises and when the poet, separated from his fellow men, at least feels himself to be one with inanimate matter, "as if, because of stone, there were still brothers," then questions arise: is this palpably growing transcendence something that really exists?

Or is this transcendence only a reflection of the emotion that sifts through the "language lattice," hallucinatory and illusory, similar to those faces painted by van Gogh that provided inspiration for two of Celan's poems?

That which had been mastered in *Sprachgitter* loses almost all of its sharp contour in *Niemandsrose.* It flows apart, reaches back to old patterns of expression, to strange as well as to familiar rhythms, which, even if they had stood the test of their own time, are now no longer adequate; they could be repeated and reeled off not as if a poet were speaking, but rather as if vocabulary and grammar had joined forces to produce lines like: "There came a stillness, and there came a storm, too/there came each and every ocean./I dig, you dig, and the worm digs too,/and the singing out there says: they dig." Artistic consciousness and insightful intensity—both are suddenly lost here and the words begin to skid around; they only act "as if." In reality, however, they do not communicate, but instead suppress what meaning resides within them or create deaf neologisms.

The *Niemandsrose* is dedicated to the memory of Osip Mandelstam. Paul Celan wrote a few lines of a poem (not particularly convincing when viewed as a whole) for this Russian poet with the Jewish heritage to whose tragic existence Celan felt brotherly ties. These lines point past the apostrophized person and betray a personal feeling of longing for the lost home: "...a path/to Russia comes to your heart,/the Karelian birch tree/has/waited,/the name Osip approaches you...." The name Osip, not the person Mandelstam. Celan is not a poet of essences and facts; he is a poet of words and concepts. His poetry is, to a high degree, abstract, but not because he is an abstract poet or—nonsensical term—a concrete poet. Rather, he writes as he does because his reality has been taken from him: his parents, the city of his birth, Bukovina, the Eastern landscape. "...Speech-scale, word-scale, home-scale, exile...." What remained, what he was able to add, was his poetry, which can only be a substitute, and not a restitution. No new literary style, no modern direction is introduced by Celan. He attempts to make existence possible in a situation that would have silenced all of the word technicians or caused them to reconsider the worth of the existent pool of language.

Mohn und Gedächtnis is Celan's first artistically successful book, although still romantically articulated. The vocabulary still has aroma, the metaphors flesh, the sound consolation. Even "Todesfuge," however horrible its theme, resonates with the faint hope that the world can be set aright, as though poetry could conquer, save, and transcend if only it were rhythmical, whispered magically, and pleasant sounding.

Sprachgitter, on the other hand—after the early style fades out in the weaker volume *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* ("From Threshold to Threshold," 1955)—was a book which in subject no less than tone expressed the concept that intense reflection in conjunction with a shocked sensibility could achieve neither trust in life nor contact with one's surroundings.

Niemandsrose, then, was a regression, a fragmentation, which called previous achievements into question. At the time of its appearance no reader could have recognized, given the presence of the old repertoire, which was sometimes employed in a downright dilettante manner, that here several extraordinary themes and revelations were hidden. Today, viewed with hindsight, these themes can be seen as keys and codes: "so/much/is asked of the one/whom hope carts up and down/the hump-backed heart-way—so/much."

Atemwende ("Breath-turning," 1967), when Celan had found a new mode of expression in a poetry of fragments ripped apart by feelings of guilt and moral hysteria, it was still not possible to discern that something irreversible had taken place, that communication was being attempted—but no longer with human beings. ("We live under an ominous sky, and—there are few human beings," as the poet had already said in 1960 in a letter to Hans Bender.) Rather, the dialogue is with those transcendental realms in which it was so difficult for Celan to believe: "Thread-suns/over the grey-black wasteland./A tree-/high thought/grasps the light's tone: there are/still songs to be sung on the other side/of mankind." From this point on, Celan does not find his way back into the realm of human communication.

His plunge into a solipsistic world can no longer be halted. The remaining island of the Ego is swamped by the unconscious and what still exists of concrete reality, what still stands as secure knowledge, fades into the unreal. Even though the poet tries to flee through ever new laby-

rinths of word and feeling, he does not succeed in escaping his moral hallucinations. On the contrary, this conflict grows to gigantic proportions, and Celan—in penance, as it were—now wants to carry the responsibility on a cosmic scale; in fact, he feels himself to be responsible for what does not even exist: "The trace of a bite in the Nowhere./It, too,/you must battle,/from here." The psychological landslides that are at work changing the personality occur during full consciousness. "The ounce of truth deep in delusion. . . ." Celan perceives both: the truth and the delusion. Like Hölderlin before him, he notices his feeling being buried under a glacier: "On the flooded trail/the little charlatan-sermon of stillness.//It is as though you could hear,/as though I loved you yet." Love is now characterized as "strait-jacket-beautiful," and Kafka's infamous sentence "For the last time psychology" is quoted in this mood, in this atomized state of mind. The poet ponders the presence and the necessity of normative regulations, the mechanics of interchangeable but, in the final analysis, unrepealable laws and prohibitions: "The broken-up taboos,/crossing and recrossing the borders between them,/world-wet, on/the hunt for meaning,/on flight from/meaning."

The last volume of poetry Celan put together himself, *Lichtzwang* ("Light-Compulsion," 1970), begins once again with a cool statement of his position. His personal situation is recognized, the way to deliverance is seen and ironically described: "Remnants of things seen, of things heard, in/dormitory one thousand and one,//day-nightly/the Bear Polka:/they retrain you,/you are once again/he." But only two poems later the darkness returns and life becomes an irredeemable promise: "Lemmings burrow.//No Later." Celan is no longer able to withdraw. The Other, Stronger entices, compels: "Foreknowledge bleeds/twice behind the curtain,//shared-knowledge/effervesces." Shared-knowledge. Presumed complicity. The poet turns against himself more and more; he accuses himself not only of being-so-and-not-different, but he also accuses himself because of the roles he plays: "Gradually clown-faced/. . . the make-up truth frozen blue/in the mouth's corner." The allusion is, possibly, to poetry readings—the exhibition of the most intimate of impulses spoken in public. Celan's words are often only apparently obscure. The truth is that he is revealing his shame and his indignation. Proof of this extraordinary moral sense of responsibility can be

found in the poem "Sink," in which Celan does indeed ask the loved one to part from him; however, at the same time he lets solicitude reign and tries to offer protection: "Sink away from me/from the bend of the elbow,//take the One/pulse beat along,//conceal yourself in it,/outside."

The pieces of the world cannot be put back together in this fractured heart. Compassion and despair have increasingly muted voices. The wish to return to lifelessness and to become one with the earth grows immeasurably: "If I were to eat the track of the cart/I would be there." Now it is not far away; the horizon recedes from his active mind, which, in turn, is closing in on him. New perspectives, monstrous abysses open up: "Now, as the prayer-hassocks are burning,/I eat the book/with all the/insignia." Only death can quench such fire, such hunger for the absolute. Death, however, is not yet ready, and so it must be pre-empted. Paul Celan drowns himself in the Seine at the end of April, 1970, seven months before his 50th birthday: "That death,/which you still owe me, I/will carry it/out."

The poems in *Schneepart* ("Snow-part"), which appeared a year after the suicide, were written between December 1967 and October 1968, in all likelihood before the texts in *Lichtzwang*. In this volume, Celan analyzes his inner situation, the increasing frigidity of his feelings, his isolation. Over and over again the focus is on snow, ice, hail, and—stone. To be sure, the author offers resistance. He confronts the emotional glacier formation, but the attempt to remain victorious, using only the metaphoric capabilities of poetry, is no longer successful. Even when the poet endeavors to hew away the "word shadows," his efforts produce relationships only within the realm of language, and none on the communicative level: "Two fingers, hand-distant,/row towards the swampy/oath."

Like Mallarmé, who, in order to imagine himself as the high priest of a sacred realm of words, endeavored to degradate to absolute nothingness that existence which tangled, hidden emotions precluded him from accepting, Celan, too, increasingly separated himself from his surroundings by creating a hermetic cult language. But this Eastern European poet, longing for annihilation, was not able to let his feelings cool off and formalize the misery. Celan, in contrast to Mallarmé, was unable to

attain any lasting tranquility. Celan's despair did not allow itself to be stylized into a telling silence, thereby excluding the essential conflict. Celan's ontological perceptions were not those of a man who had to imagine coldness and emptiness from the haven of a materially secure, middle-class existence. The vacuum came to Celan of its own accord; it came to be through the erosion of all things, concepts, feelings: "The chaff/of futile devotion/a/cob-blow/away from the prayer-silos." Or: "Eternity keeps itself in bounds."

Since Paul Celan was not able to wring any consolation from religion or any solidarity from interpersonal relationships, he lost himself in an isolation inhabited solely by a few symbols and word fetishes. When even his familiar anchor was lost and his wife became the "snowed one," he drifted aimlessly on the open sea, the world nothing more than a life boat drifting out of reach as he went under.

Toward the end of June we saw the grave. It was completely barren. The wreaths had been cleared off of the blooming field full of weeds, soon destined to become the next row of graves. At the head of the mound a black metal marker had been stuck into the light, loose earth. Upon this marker, the dates were temporarily written in white:

Paul
Anischel-Celan
1920-1970

At first the men in the cemetery office could give us no information. They only had a man by the name of Ceran in their books. And the one we sought was listed (with the wrong third letter of his last name) as Anlschel: Paul Anlschel-Celan, buried on the twelfth of May, 1970, field 32, row 12, grave number 39. The cemetery, the Cimetière Parisien in the southern suburb of Thiais, in the immediate vicinity of the Orly airport, is a complex with 123 lots.

ON PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Donald Hamilton,
Daniel C. Nutzel, Carrie Ohst,
and Susan O'Shaughnessy

Celan's work is widely regarded as a good example of esoteric verse; and it does indeed contain many obscure and enigmatic elements. The poet, however, definitely and expressly considered his work to be comprehensible. When pressed for an explanation, in all sincerity he urged: "Just read. Just keep on reading, and understanding will come of its own accord." Of course Celan's poetry does require an especially attuned audience and one as well-read as the author himself. The basic difficulty of a Celan poem results from its lack of connection with a lyric tradition that, regardless of imagery or metaphor, defines the relationship of the poetic subject to reality in mimetic forms. The decisive moment of Celan's initial development occurred at the time fascism was spreading in Rumania, a phenomenon to which the country's opposition poetry reacted with an inclination towards allegorical language. In addition to the symbolist, expressionist, and romantic traditions, the poetry of surrealism, not least of all as it was practiced by its Rumanian representatives, had such a vivid effect upon the young poet that he developed as his basic methodological principle a system of highly figurative expression.

The often seemingly dark poetry of Paul Celan does emit its own unique light. Thus it is capable of offering insights even when it seems to defy concentrated efforts to understand it: its transfigurations and associations for the most part allow the reader to sense their inner necessity and logic without having to subject them to rational analysis. Celan's verse exerts a strong appeal even when its meaning remains more or less hidden, since his use of language nearly always expresses its own poetic legitimation. In his early works this was achieved essentially with the aid

of suggestive rhythmic and melodic patterns, such as those seen in "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue"), and occasionally by means of rhyme (which was almost totally avoided after the mid-1960s). Subsequently, this was often achieved by presenting lyrical language as a seeking, groping, developing process that now and then appears to result from the interplay of impulses and restraints. Finally this is attained through the strict interlocking of polysemantic elements to form a harmonious whole. However, one element in Celan's poetry transcends the many stylistic developments and remains the primary and ultimate creative force, continually renewing itself even when it on occasion seems seriously endangered: namely, the guiding principle of dialogue. To be sure, Celan's poetic concept is already formed before being confronted by Gottfried Benn's apotheosis of the absolute poem, i.e., the apodictic positing of a poem without faith and addressed to no one. But Celan's poetry develops specifically in opposition to Benn's position: Celan conceives of an emphatically communicative poem, a poem addressed to someone. And while Benn maintains in one of his poems that only two things are real, the void and the marked Ego, a realm to which he withdraws in complacent melancholy, Celan insistently refuses to withdraw his marked Ego from the world and replace the world with it; instead he makes the contrary attempt—sometimes hopefully, sometimes despairingly—to establish a worthy relationship of this Ego to the world, no matter how unworthy this world may often appear. As a poet and in his poetry he continually seeks a humane world.

For all its continuity Celan's poetry has in the course of the years indeed undergone considerable change. When one compares the sonorous, rhythmically and melodically unfolding verse of his early period—often excessively ornate and embellished with rhyme—to the later short poems with their tendency towards pointed sarcasm, short lines, retarding division of words, and enjambment, one may easily arrive at the conclusion that one is dealing with the works of totally different authors. If, however, we read Celan's poems as the process of an unrelenting, self-regenerating reaction to the world (and do not neglect to count the poems themselves as part of the world), we will, for all that, sense the unity of Celan's work and will be able to discern the unifying conditions which underlie the diverse components of his oeuvre. It is, in the final analysis,

the same historical basis, the same experience in the world and in life, that give rise, for example, to poems such as the lyrically structured "Todesfuge" from Celan's first book, as well as to these lines from *Schneepart* ("Snow Part," 1971), which are technically so different: "The world whose stuttering is to be mimicked,/whose guest I/shall have been, a name/sweated forth from the wall,/upon which a wound oozes upward."

The central noun names precisely that world which will transcend the lyrical Ego, a world that the Ego views from both sides of death, a world to which the Ego, "wounded by reality," is inevitably bound. What seems here to be but an undercurrent comes clearly to light in other poems and is on occasion explicitly mentioned; Celan's manner of observing the world is marked by a process of constant memory and remembrance; even events of the distant past remain omnipresent, and thus there is no past and no forgetting. To be sure, to combine time and space in his poems has always been the sovereign right of the poet and his genre; however, when Paul Celan asserts "All places are here and now," this key statement signifies that his Here and Now includes all of the traumatizing moments of his experience, and it is precisely these which determine his perspective on life, and thus the—in his mature poetry quite unsentimental—elegiac tenor of his works.

John Felstiner

PAUL CELAN'S TRIPLE EXILE

Flight, exile, and multi-lingualness came by inheritance to Paul Celan as to many others in Eastern Europe. His father's family, from Galicia, fled the Russians during World War One; and from Bukovina, his mother's family fled then to Bohemia. Born in 1920 in Czernowitz, Bukovina, the eastern outpost of the Austrian empire until 1918, then the northernmost province of Rumania, Celan grew up in a German-speaking Jewish milieu, learning Hebrew at one school and Rumanian at another. After the Hitler-Stalin pact, Russian forces occupied the city. Then in 1941, Nazi and Rumanian troops set about burning plundering, torturing, murdering, and deporting thousands of Jews. Celan, an only child, saw his parents taken in a 1942 ghetto sweep, and that winter he learned that both of them, brutally exhausted in a Transnistrian labor camp, were shot by the SS. He himself spent eighteen months shoveling rocks in southeast Rumania; "I have seen life exchanged for the utmost bitterness," he wrote a friend, but in the same letter also began sending her poems. After barely escaping execution, he fled to the Soviet army and then returned to Czernowitz, occupied again by the Russians in 1944. A year later Celan abandoned his homeland and Soviet rule for Bucharest, where he worked as a translator from Russian into Rumanian. In 1947 he fled to Vienna with a rucksack and a manuscript of poems, then in 1948 finally settled in Paris.

Czernowitz, Bucharest, Vienna, Paris: it sounds somewhat like the signature to *Ulysses*—"Trieste, Zurich, Paris"—except that Joyce the artist's exile seems richly voluntary. A figure Celan once used for the situation of the poet suggests what his own exile felt like. "A poem," he said, "can be a message in a bottle, sent off in the (not always greatly hopeful) belief that it may somewhere and sometime wash up on land." Like being shipwrecked, stranded—and the fact that he drew this figure

from Osip Mandelstam helps identify the Jewish along with the territorial nature of Celan's exile.

To call it a triple exile seems truest to me: from Bukovina, from Jerusalem, from the German language itself. All three elements come together in Celan's opening words for a speech he gave acknowledging Germany's Bremen Prize in 1958. "The landscape from which I come to you might be unfamiliar to most of you. It is the landscape that was home to a not inconsiderable part of those Hasidic stories which Martin Buber has retold for us all in German." Celan's tactful regret that Bukovina is strange and now gone; his modest need to recall a Judaic culture now also gone; his pointed reference to Buber's translations, that doomed infusion of Jewishness into the German tongue—in such ways Celan had to begin his speech of thanks in Germany. Buber, he says, "retold for us all in German" the Hasidic Stories—but who are "us all"? Can Celan have said that with anything but the acutest irony?

Because I think that in America, we need as much as ever to have the phenomenon of exile borne in upon us, I'd like summarily to document Celan's triple exile, to draw a profile of it. I might also mention that as biographer-cum-translator, my need to have the poet's speeches, letters, and remarks in English forms part of my whole attempt at apprehending him.

First, the exile from Bukovina. In that 1958 speech he called his homeland a region "now reduced to historylessness." Then in 1960, afflicted by a groundless plagiarism charge and obsessed by neo-Nazism and antisemitism, Celan in Paris longed for his Rumanian writer-friends of the 40s: "You know," he wrote to his old Rumanian mentor, "I've often wondered if I'd have been better off staying among the books of my homeland." In Western Europe he felt himself an *Ostjude,* irrevocably exiled to the West, far from the East and Czernowitz. In his great speech called "The Meridian," accepting the prestigious Büchner prize in 1960, Celan said his poetry was "seeking the place of my own origin... on a child's map." The meridian of exile, he meant, ultimately pointed him round again to Bukovina.

Second, the exile from Jerusalem, in this case the Diaspora fate of any European Jew. As a child, Celan resisted his father's Orthodox and Zionist persuasion. In 1934, shortly after a Bar Mitzvah he underwent

grudgingly, the boy learned just how Jewish he was. A letter to an aunt recently emigrated to Palestine says, "I could write a 300-page opus about antisemitism in our school." Years later, after the war, he wrote to her again: "Perhaps I am one of the last who must live out to the end the destiny of the Jewish spirit in Europe . . . and that may be saying a lot." Towards the end of his life Celan at last visited Israel. "I think I have a notion of what Jewish loneliness can be," he said to the Hebrew Writers Association. "I have come to you in Israel because I needed to." His time there moved and heartened him. "So many Jews, only Jews, and not in a ghetto," he remarked back in Paris. He wrote a series of poems graced by Israeli place-names and even thought of settling there, but I think the near-messianic challenge of it finally daunted him.

And third, the exile from German itself. "Can you bear it," he addressed some lines shortly after her death to his mother, who'd sung and spoken him into the language—"Can you bear it, as oh! at home in an earlier time, / my mother—the gentle, the German, the pain-laden rhyme?" I've worked on this couplet over three years now, trying to touch the nerve in it. *Und duldest du, Mutter, wie einst, ach, daheim, / den leisen, den deutschen, den schmerzlichen Reim?* Language, Celan said in 1958, was his only refuge, "this one thing remained in the midst of the losses. . . . But it had to pass through its own answerlessnesses, pass through a frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech."

For some reason Celan did not settle in Vienna but continued to Paris, where he taught those great internal exiles Hölderlin and Kafka, and also translated brilliantly: Shakespeare, Dickinson, Rimbaud, Valéry, Cayrol's *Night and Fog,* Yevtushenko's *Babi Yar,* above all Sergei Esenin, who ended insane and a suicide, and Mandelstam, who perished in exile. Why did Celan translate so much? Partly to earn a living and partly, I imagine, to make the German language house such spirits as Mandelstam. During the Sixties Celan would sign his letters "Russki poët in partibus nemetskich infidelium," "a Russian poet among German heathens." A profound malaise in those years made him feel his exile acutely. From Paris he wrote to his Rumanian friend (and first translator) Petre Solomon, wondering whether to give up writing entirely: "Maybe I should take flight, but you know what this means for a Ger-

man-language author who has lived through the Nazi terror . . . to see himself broken away from his language for the second time." And when I hear that from Celan, I ask myself, What does it mean for the *translator* to break such an author away from his language?

For Celan the last break with his mother tongue, the last banishment, came in March 1970 when he read at the Stuttgart Hölderlin bicentenary. His syntax by then had become more and more ruptured, his imagery obscure—the effects, in part, of an exile writing the mother tongue that became the murderers' tongue. With this Hölderlin audience versed in ambiguity and obscurity, Celan's poetry nevertheless fell on deaf ears. People called it "dark," "sealed-off." A month later he ended his exile, drowning in the Seine.

Nothing illustrates Celan's triple exile—and my own desire to recover him—so clearly as the lyrics of his that end in a Hebrew word or phrase. Elsewhere I've discussed "*Du sei wie du,*" "You be like you," a poem of the broken covenant between a Jew and Jerusalem, a poem that renews the covenant through speech in the tower of exile, closing with Isaiah's *kumi ori,* "Arise, shine,": now here is a poem called "*Die Schleuse,*" "The Sluice," whose closing stanzas voice a loss even as they enact a recovery:

Die Schleuse
. . . . . .
An
die Vielgötterei
verlor ich ein Wort, das mich suchte:
Kaddisch.

Durch
die Schleuse musst ich,
das Wort in die Salzflut zurück-
und hinaus- und hinüberzuretten:
Jiskor.

The Sluice
. . . . . .
To
poly-goddedness
I lost a word that sought me:
Kaddish.

Through
the sluice I had to go,
to salvage the word back into
and out of and across the salt flood:
Yiskor.

Celan's tortuous wording, especially towards the end, shows the strain his own language underwent in exile. Meanwhile those two Hebrew terms for commemorating the dead—*Kaddish* implying "holy" and *Yiskor,* "remembrance"—remain strange to the German poem, unassimilated. I leave them untranslated because Celan wanted them that way.

Finally, a poem I hesitate to introduce because its endless enfoldings and ambiguities elude me. Celan wrote "*Mandelnde*" in September 1968 but withheld the poem from publication. Found among his literary remains, it heads up a sequence of later poems that emerged from his 1969 visit to Israel, as if "*Mandelnde*" presaged that return from exile:

MANDELNDE, die du nur halbsprachst,
doch durchzittert vom Keim her,
dich
liess ich warten,
dich.

Und war
noch nicht
entäugt,
noch unverdornt im Gestirn
des Lieds, das beginnt:
Hachnissini.

ALMONDING ONE, you half-spoke only,
though trembled up through from the bud,
you
I let wait,
you.

And was
not eye-
reft yet,
not yet enthorned in the realm
of that song which begins:
Hachnissini.

The *Mandel,* "almond"—because it is prized among the first fruits in Palestine, because its nut can be sweet or bitter, because an almond eye suggests the Levant, and because of Osip Mandelstam—the *Mandel* means Jewishness throughout Celan's writing. "Make me bitter. / Number me among the almonds," he says in an early poem to the Jewish dead. This late poem, "*Mandelnde,*" turns the German noun into a verb and then into a highly unusual gerund, to address an "almonding woman"—someone he'd known as a girl in Czernowitz, also perhaps his lost mother, also in a way the *Shekhinah,* the female presence of God in the world Celan in exile delayed acknowledging this Judaic presence, this blinding which is spiritual vision, this song whose opening word his own poem comes round to in Hebrew: *Hachnissini.* A very famous lyric by the leading modern Hebrew Poet, Bialik, begins with *Hachnissini,* "Bring me in":

> Bring me in under your wing,
> and be mother and sister to me,
> and let your breast shelter my head,
> a nest for my scattered prayers.
> . . . . . .
> now I've nothing in the world—
> I have nothing.
>
> Bring me in . . .

This lyric's erotic longing, as with the Song of Songs, has over the decades taken on spiritual overtones of a return from homelessness. Jews have known it by heart since the turn of the century; in fact Celan in Jerusalem remembered and recited some Bialik to friends—possibly these lines. I am unsure, even native German speakers I've asked are unsure, what to make of Celan's taut, contorted German in "*Mandelnde.*" But I am sure that *Hachnissini,* which happily transliterates the same into German and English—I'm sure the word mattered immensely to Paul Celan, summoning as it does a prewar Jewish childhood in Bukovina, supplanting a pain-laden German, and speaking a Hebraic kind of password, a shibboleth.

Götz Wienold

For Yoshibo

CELAN

Tr. by Joachim Herrmann and Rebecca S. Rodgers

The destruction of the human psyche by Auschwitz... the images and words of religion and literature through which our feelings are projected onto the world have been destroyed, and we, born later, want to rejoice at the liberation that has resulted from that destruction. But whoever experienced it—whatever tender nature lived through it and was compelled to the realization that everything ever said about Man and God is untrue because man is so incomprehensibly cruel, base, and evil (indeed, a monster of his own breed to everyone he pursues in his rage)—whoever, then, lived through it and was forced to concede its reality: his or her psyche was and remains irreparably damaged.

Do we really want to penetrate the images and words of a poet, of Celan; do we really want to experience, absorb, and carry that which psychically exists within them: the emotions of a man who was able to put into words what he had experienced? And should we tell anyone else what we may have discovered there, and say what others, should they desire, could discover in this or in their own way? I have slowly come to the conclusion that it is more important to refrain from interpreting and leave it up to each individual to decide how he wants to read poetry, including Celan's. At most, we should say something about the structure which forms within us, and within which we live, so that we may shed some light on our human world, our consciousness, our symbols, and our traditions. This should really be thoroughly elaborated, and the language one would like to recommend for such an elaboration should be well considered and defined within the discussion itself. Clarification is needed of the word "our," for example, as I just used it—almost magically—in "our human world," "our consciousness," and "our sym-

bols." As if that were an adequate way of speaking about this.

Celan was important to me, and this importance remains. For many years, reading Celan helped me to improve my understanding of the violent impact Auschwitz had had on our consciousness and bodies. In this way I heard the scream. And today we indeed live in many Auschwitzes. Heiner Kipphardt recently reopened the wounds in *Bruder Eichmann.*

Nevertheless, when I speak about Celan, I also want to say something about his language: about the rhythm and meter, about the sound, the images, and the enchantment. If, for example, someone gives us a poem about a blade of grass pushing through the snow on a mountain slope and surviving in the biting wind, and if this person adds that even here there is life to be found, then it does not take much for us to begin to understand the feeling in the poet's words. When I have read Celan, it has often taken me weeks, months, or half a year to develop an understanding of a poem that has moved me. Some poems I was never able to understand, and yet their presence remained strong.

We are tempted to consider "Fadensonnen" ("Thread-suns") in the same light as the poem about the blade of grass:

> Thread-suns
> over the gray-black wasteland.
> A tree-
> high thought
> grasps the light's pitch; there are
> songs still to be sung beyond
> mankind.

A comparison of the two is based primarily on the unusually comprehensible sentence, rare for Celan, found at the end: "there are/songs still to be sung beyond/mankind." And yet "Fadensonnen" demands of us and gives us something which is part of the very enchantment about which we have already spoken. "The light's pitch": a phrase we can carry within us; a possible physical sensation we may have; an experience of which we perhaps do not yet know the details; a sound; something which might stay—or goes away again.

A poem from *Mohn und Gedächtnis* ("Poppy and Memory") which has long interested me is "Kristall" ("Crystal"):

Not on my lips seek your mouth,
not before the gate the stranger,
not in an eye the teardrop.

Seven nights higher red wanders to red,
seven hearts deeper the hand knocks on the gate,
seven roses later the fountain murmurs.

First of all, one notices the relative clarity of expression in the first strophe and the apparently relatively simple parallels to the corresponding lines of the second strophe:

lips on a mouth—red wanders to red
before the gate the stranger—the hand knocks on the gate
in an eye the teardrop—the fountain murmurs.

In addition to the semantic equivalents—in the definition of Roman Jakobson—which are found between the strophes, there are also the semantic, syntactic, phonological (graphematical), and metrical equivalents within the strophes themselves. Secondly, in spite of this "clarity," we notice the cryptic nature of the second strophe and feel, perhaps, the enchantment of image and sound until the end: "Seven roses later the fountain murmurs."

In Celan it has often appeared to me that the poetic process takes place in such a way that a certain type of word combination—usually found at the end—is achieved (or more easily achieved) and placed in a possible context. Taken on its own, the enchanting phrase "seven roses later the fountain murmurs" contains no element on which to base an understanding; or, as we could say, too many such elements.

As a result of the poetic process, however, Celan establishes associations among elements on which an understanding can be built. The phrase can be uttered, can be received, and the reader can perhaps retain it in his memory without having to attribute a meaning to it. (Celan also chose the first half of the line "seven roses later" as the title of the first cycle of poems in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* ["From Threshold to Threshold"]; and "the fountain murmurs" is turned into the title of a poem in *Die Niemandsrose* ["The No One's Rose"], in which the phrase

"later of the roses" also appears. Apparently Celan saw "seven roses later the fountain murmurs" as a memorable formulation and one worthy of repetition.)

And so the clear, simple structure of "Kristall" emerges: a structure of multiple equivalents which may also be seen in relation to the title. We realize that a specific meaning can hardly be attributed to the lines of the second strophe, yet we wish nevertheless to hear and recite them, listen again, and ponder their meaning: this is what I mean by "enchantment." (We may venture to analyze these lines, which makes us forget the enchantment and makes us sense that a wound lies beneath the surface of the poetic language. When we become conscious of this wound—seven roses later—then the fountain murmurs.)

If space allowed, this would be the place to go into a detailed discussion of Celan's use of meter: meter in a broad sense, where one analyzes not only phonological structures and their patterns and possible equivalents, but also their relationship to semantic, syntactic, and graphematical structures and patterns, and to the possible equivalents within this group. Among Celan's early poems there are a few in which there is a regular recurrence of groups of verses, and which may therefore be called strophic. There are poetic forms which recur, are easily recognizable, and follow a simple strophic pattern. The poem "Ins Nebelhorn" ("Into the Foghorn," also from *Mohn und Gedächtnis*) corresponds in this respect, for example, to the poem "Kristall," and a similar pattern of equivalents immediately emerges:

Mouth with the hidden mirror,
knee before the column of pride,
hand with the grate bar:

give each other the dark,
say my name,
lead me to him.

Several other poems should be mentioned in this context: "Auf Reisen" ("Travel") and "Der Reisekamerad" ("The Travelling Companion") from this volume, and "Von Dunkel zu Dunkel" ("From Dark to Dark") from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle.*

The traditional form of the four-line stanza appears occasionally in Celan's earlier poetry, sometimes even including rhyme:[1]

So you are rebegotten
as one I have not known:
inside a land of fountains
your heartbeat reigns, your own,

where never a mouth is drinking,
no forms to bind the shade,
illusion springs as waters,
and springs like spirits fade—

you sink in all the fountains,
through every Seem you sway;
that it might be forgotten,
you found such periled play.

(Tr. Esther Cameron)

Other examples of the use of these traditional elements can be found in "Wer wie du" ("Whoever Like You"), "Totenhemd" ("Shroud"), "Ich bin allein" ("I Am Alone"), "So schlafe" ("Then Sleep"), and "Der Tauben weiBeste" ("The Whitest of the Doves) from *Mohn und Gedächtnis;* "Zu zweit" ("The Two of Us") and "Inselhin" ("Isleward") from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle;* "Schuttkahn" ("Rubble-boat") from *Sprachgitter* ("Language-lattice"); "Das Wort vom Zur-Tiefe-Gehn" ("The Word of Going-to-the-depth"), "Stumme Herbstgerüche" (Dumb Autumn Smells"), "Eis, Eden" ("Ice, Eden"), "Schwarzerde" ("Blackearth"), "Nachmittag mit Zirkus und Zitadelle" ("Afternoon with Circus and Citadel"), "Kermorvan," "Was geschah?" ("What Occurred?"), and "Wohin mir das Wort" ("Where My Word") from *Niemandsrose;* and, finally, "Harnischstriemen" ("Armorweals") from *Atemwende* ("Breath-turning").

In addition I would like to mention some poems using couplets: "Espenbaum" ("Aspen Tree") and "Sie kämmt ihr Haar" ("She Combs Her Hair") from *Mohn und Gedächtnis*), "In die Ferne" ("Into the Distance") from *Sprachgitter,* "Selbdritt, selbviert" ("The Three of

Us, the Four of Us") from *Niemandsrose.* Others have five-line strophes: "Auge der Zeit" ("Time's Eye") and "Wir sehen dich" ("We see you") from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle.* Among the earlier poems we also find combinations of such strophic forms. Many striking equivalents of semantic, syntactic, phonological, and graphametical structures can be found within poems which are not obviously strophic in form, and there are many instances of recurrence: sometimes exact, sometimes approximate. This is also true of the longer poems, which make freer use of metric and strophic variations; it is true of "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue").

It is my impression that Celan moves further and further away from this use of meter and such obvious equivalents. Even in "Fadensonnen" it is still possible, using the Jakobson approach, to discover them, but they are less obvious and less dependent on the recurrence of phonological metrical structures. In place of the recurrence of exact or approximate equivalents within strophic patterns, there is a variation from line to line, with little correspondence between metric and semantic, or syntactic, phrasings or groups: here, again, see "Fadensonnen." Each phrase seems to stand independent of the others—without need of support by a poetic process that generates related elements on which an understanding can be built—as I attempted to demonstrate with the poem "Kristall." I am tempted to speculate that Celan would never have placed lines such as "Thread-suns/over the gray-black wasteland" at the beginning of an early poem, or that he would, at least, have provided further formulations whose semantic relationships to these lines would be more or less apparent. Metrically, when I recite these poems, I sense the balance between each line and its neighbors, and perhaps even in relation to the poem as a whole, despite the absence of metrical structures.

Perhaps we can even put it like this: among his earlier poems, a poem such as "Augenblicke" would have had metrical and other structural counterparts and equivalents:

Moments, whose signs,	Augenblicke, wessen Winke,
no brightness sleeps.	keine Helle schläft.
Undisbecome, everywhere,	Unentworden, allerorten,
collect yourself,	sammle dich,
stand.	steh.

In *Fadensonnen,* which appeared later than the poem of the same name, "Augenblicke" stands alone, unrelated to other poems. There are still related elements to be found within the poem itself: "Augenblicke"—"Winke"; "-worden"—"-orten"; "keine"—"un-"; "sammle dich"—"steh," to name only the most striking examples. But we no longer find the obvious use of equivalents and recurrent metrical structures.

A comparison of the relatively few long poems from Celan's later collections and the long, metrically freer poems of his earlier period—e.g., "Todesfuge"—will, perhaps, lead the reader to similar conclusions. I think we can say that Celan ultimately renounced lyrical enchantment. This all should, of course, be expanded and modified, carefully considered with regard to the general and the particular; and it should be based on a thorough study of Celan's metrics. As I was able to touch only superficially on these points, I ask that the reader examine them with the appropriate degree of caution.

May I now add, then: this earlier, clearer method of formulation, based on equivalents, enables the reader to absorb and retain, for himself and perhaps for others, more of the impact of the Nazi, of the German persecution and extermination of the Jews . . . and of man? Reference to this experience is so clearly intended in the earlier poems that we must recognize it and must (may? can?) accept it. In Celan's last collection, *Schneepart* ("Snow-part"), the poem "Ein Blatt" ("A Leaf"), in its openly stated allusion, establishes a link to this time of persecution: "A leaf, treeless,/for Bertolt Brecht://What times are these,/where a conversation/is almost a crime,/because it includes/so many things said?" And yet there are many references to new, current impressions—of scientific and technical developments, for example—in all of Celan's later works. He writes of the endlessly repeated, hitherto unprecedented injury to the human body and psyche, as in "Streu Ocker" ("Strew Ochre"), from *Lichtzwang* ("Light-compulsion"). Here we find, on the one hand, a certain metric and structural similarity to the style of the earlier poems, and, on the other hand, we recognize that what I said about the metrics of "Fadensonnen" and the manner in which related elements are used sparingly or not all, applies to this poem as well.[2]

I will not attempt at this time to develop this concept explicitly:

Strew ochre in my eyes:
you live
no longer inside them.

save
your grave-
gifts, save them,

pace off the rows of stones
on your hands,

with their dream
brush over the scurf
of the coined-out
temporal bone,

at the great
bifurcation, re-
count yourself to the ochre,
three times, nine times.

(Tr. Esther Cameron.)

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1. The original rhyme scheme, abab, etc., could not be kept (Tr.).
2. In referring, here and above, to Celan's "early" and "late" poetry, I use these words only to enable me to discuss certain observations and to sum them up in a simple manner. I do not wish to juxtapose an "early Celan" with a "late Celan," or to play the two off against one another. My terminology is not meant to imply some grand theory, but simply to make it possible to speak of certain things.

Esther Cameron

THE DISTANT EARTH: CELAN'S PLANETARY VISION

We have all become familiar, in recent years, with the image of a small, cloud-veiled sphere, seen against the vast darkness of space. As Jonathan Schell observed in his recent book, *The Fate of the Earth,* these photographs make us aware of "a new relation between ourselves and the earth... we stand outside nature, holding instruments of cosmic power with which we can blot life out, while at the same time we remain embedded in nature and depend on it for survival."

The image of earth, seen from a distance, also appears in the poetry of Paul Celan. On the one hand this image symbolizes the question whether humankind can survive in the technological world, "overflown by stars of human manufacture"; on the other hand it represents the hope of a human response to this question. Not rockets, but anguish over the Holocaust and fear for the human future propel the poet to the "no-place" from which he looks back toward the planet.

Among poets, Celan was not the first in space; that honor, as far as I am aware, belongs to Dante Alighieri, who wrote in the twenty-second canto of the *Paradiso*:

> With my sight I returned through every one of the seven spheres, and I saw this globe such that I smiled at its paltry semblance; and that judgment which holds it for least I approve as best, and he whose thought is on other things may rightly be called just... The little threshing-floor that makes us so fierce all appeared to me from hills to river-mouths, while I was wheeling with the eternal Twins. Then to the fair eyes I turned my eyes again.
>
> (Sinclair translation)

It is clear that Dante overcomes Earth's gravity by means of the Christian evaluation of earthly life in relation to eternal life. The just man must deprecate earth, which represents the desires of the flesh; it is "the little

threshing-floor which makes us so fierce." And yet Dante, even at this height, does not cease to concern himself with Earth and its problems. If earthly desires had left him, the concern for Earth had not. Thus the Christian formulation does not completely render Dante's feelings as poet.

In Celan's work the image of Earth first appears in surrealistic guise, in "Dunkles Aug im September" ("Dark Eye in September," 1948):[1]

> Time, helmet of stone. And ever more richly
> the ringlets of pain well up by the face of the earth,
> that drunken apple, turned brown by the breath
> of a sinful saying: lovely and averse to the game
> which they play in the baleful
> reflection of their future.

Here the epithet "that drunken apple" recalls the story of the Tree of Knowledge and the view of Earth as source of temptations. But this view is not dominant. Earth suffers under the weight of this time, which presses upon it like a "helmet of stone." The apple is "turned brown by the breath of a sinful saying"—this recalls the Nazis with their brown uniforms and their "death-bringing talk," as Celan put it in the Bremen speech. Even if we say that it is the conditions of life on earth ("the little threshing-floor which makes us so fierce") which are ultimately responsible for these crimes, earth itself is "averse to the game" and may not continue to tolerate man's presence in the future whose reflection is already "baleful." This may be interpreted as a hint that the Holocaust was an anticipation of the approaching end of humanity. On the other hand, the fact the Earth is portrayed as a *head* suggests the hope that *the consciousness of earth*—a common consciousness of humans living on it—will awake. The poem "Zuversicht" ("Confidence"), from *Sprachgitter* ("Lattice of Speech," 1959) ends: "as if, because there is stone, there were still brothers."

The distant view of Earth does not appear again in Celan's first three collections, which trace the path of the poet within the post-Holocaust world. The favorite topos in this depiction is "stone": symbol of pain, of the hardness of the human heart, and at the same time of the

world's objective existence, which might—perhaps—become the basis for mutual understanding among its inhabitants. In these collections the language becomes less and less lyrical, more and more precise, as if in an attempt to match the precision of technological language with a new precision of the spirit. In *Sprachgitter* (1959) one is struck by the frequency of geological terms; in the last poem, "Engführung" ("The Straitening," as Michael Hamburger translates it), it is precisely the contact with the stone which lets us break through to a mysterious, immaterial world which soon closes again before our eyes.

In the story "Gespräch im Gebirg" ("Colloquy in the Mountains," 1959) Celan summarizes his "geology." A Jew walks through the mountains, over the stone, accompanied by the anti-Semitic comments of an anonymous narrator, and meets a second Jew. The two start talking, "for when one Jew meets another, it's goodbye silence, even in the mountains. For a Jew and nature are two different things." Thus language represents the Jew's detachment from nature. One of the Jews says:

> You know. You know and you see: up here the earth folded itself, folded itself once, twice, three times, and opened itself up in the middle, and in the middle stands some water, and the water is green, and the green is white, and the white comes from still further up, you could say, but you shouldn't say it, that that is the language that counts here, the green with the white in it, a language not for you and not for me—for, I ask, who was the earth thought up for, not for you, I say, was it thought up, and not for me—a language—well, without any I and without any You, just He, just It, you understand, just She and They and nothing but that.

The earth's having folded itself three times recalls the Christian trinity (Dreifaltigkeit). The hardness of the human heart is also the silence of the non-human world, amid which human language sounds meaningless. The Jew talking to his alter ego in the mountains stands at the edge of the world.

This is the place—a place of exile, solitude, and despair—from which the poet breaks through, in the *Meridian* (1960) to outer space, when he says of art: "It is to step out of the human dimension, into a realm which turns toward the human an uncanny countenance." Whoever leaves the human dimension becomes estranged not only from

nature but from himself. "Art creates a distance from the I." This is no impersonal process: it is one's own I that one is estranged from. ("Go with art into the strait that is most your own. And set yourself free.") Such estrangement enables the artist to "grasp the natural as the natural by means of art"—to grasp the objectivity and totality of the world, which, unlike the reality described by science, includes the poet himself and his fate. And the same time he is moving, along paths of language, toward the other as a creature also able to go out of himself or herself. The hope for an encounter in a place beyond humanity, A "u-topia," is also the hope for a new social consciousness by which, as from some "Archimedean point," the earth might be moved. Thus, at the end of the speech, the image of Earth appears to the reader, when Celan says:

> I find that which connects and which leads, like the poem, to the encounter.
>
> I find something which, like language, is immaterial, yet earthly, terrestrial, something circular, which intersects both poles and, amusingly, even crosses the tropics[2]: I find . . . *a meridian.*

The vision of Earth reappears in the collection following the *Meridian, Die Niemandsrose* ("The No-Man's Rose," 1963), whose first poem strongly recalls the *Meridian*:

> THERE WAS EARTH IN THEM, and
> they dug.
>
> They dug and they dug, their day
> passed in this way, and their night. And they did not praise God,
> who, they heard, had willed all this,
> who, they heard, had known all this.
>
> They dug and they knew nothing more,
> they did not grow wise, made no song,
> they invented for themselves no language at all.
> They dug.
>
> There came a stillness, there came a storm,
> there came the oceans, all of them.
> I did, and you dig, and the worm digs too,
> and what sings there says: they are digging.

O someone, O no-one, O No-One, O *thou,*
where did it lead to, the road that led nowhere?
O you dig, and I dig, I am digging towards you,
and on our fingers awakens the ring.

At first glance the meaning of the word "Erde" in this poem seems to be "soil" rather than Earth as planet. But the "ring" which "awakens" at the end is the "meridian": it is language as that which connects the speaker with his hearers and gives rise to sympathy and identification across all interhuman boundaries. The victims suffered and "invented for themselves no language at all"; their road "led nowhere." Again we are forced to leave the human dimension: to speak of these things without consoling oneself, without deluding oneself, is in some measure to live the suffering and death of the victims: "they dug," therefore "I dig" and "you dig." The "I" and the "you" who dig their way toward each other are also in a sense dead. But, being annihilated, they meet in the "nothing," which in the Kabbala (*Niemandsrose*) shows the influence of Gershom Scholem's works on this subject is also the *eyn-sof* (infinite), the primal essence of Divine being.

A poem toward the end of the collection, beginning "Crowned out,/spat out into the night," repeats this process and weaves into it the theme of erotic love. The poet again recalls the exile and humiliation to which, as a member of the Jewish people, he was exposed. Yet these humiliations were also the sign of a royal destiny (in Midrash, the Jewish people is often referred to as "a king's son"). But Celan, as a Jew living among Gentiles and writing in German, was partially estranged even from his own people. This ultimate exile leads to a meeting, in outer space, with the feminine principle:

Blue-gulf, into you
I drive the gold. Even with that
which was wasted on whores and harlots
I come and I come. To you,
beloved.
(...)
With names, soaked through
with every exile.
With names and seed,

with names dipped in all
chalices that brim with your
royal blood, Human—in all
calyxes of the great
Ghetto-Rose, from which
you look out at us, immortal from so many
deaths died on roads of tomorrow.

Again Kabbalistic associations occur: the union of the "I" and the "you" resembles that of Yesod (Foundation) and Malkhut (Kingdom), the last of the stages by which the Divine energy becomes manifest. Malkhut, also known as "the Congregation of Israel," "the bride," and "the Shekhina," represents community and is symbolized by the rose. (Dante's celestial rose is a Christian version of this symbolism.) Yesod is represented by the poet as one who has left the human dimension in order to speak of things that are beyond the human capacity to bear; thus Malkhut here is the reader as representative of the poet's audience as a whole. By means of the "you" a modulation takes place between the image of the "beloved" and the image of the "human" in general which looks out at us from the "Ghetto-Rose." One may say that an "I-thou" relation exists between the poet and every reader, and that the name "you" applies to all readers, who are to this extent united by a common identity and destiny. The logic of this union gives rise to a dream of world revolution which the poet, in his exile, cannot help dreaming: "And we sang the Varshovyanka,/With reed-choked lips, Petrarca,/In tundra-ears, Petrarca.") From the no-place, the place of annihilation-and-identification, the Archimedean point, comes the promise: "And an earth will climb up to us, our earth,/this one." Exile from earth, encounter at the "Archimedean point" with the "you," unification of those who answer to the name of "you," and "raising of the earth" by the force of love and wisdom—this is the fundamental dialectic of *Die Niemandsrose.* This vision follows of necessity from the poetic process, from the faith in language, despite the despair with which the poet struggles throughout the collection. The last words of *The No-Man's-Rose* are "too late." But first, we have heard words like these:

The eye, dark,
as a booth-window. It gathers

what was, what still is, a world: the Wandering
East, the
Hovering Ones, the
Humans-and-Jews,
the Folk-of-the-Clouds, magnetically
it pulls, with heart-fingers, at
you, Earth:
you come, you come,
dwell, we shall dwell...

Here the syntax in German ("wohnen werden wir, wohnen") recalls a Hebrew construction (shakhon nishkon). The return of the Shekhina (literally, "indwelling") from exile is anticipated.

The hope for the return of the Shekhina, which is both the exiled feminine half of God and the Jewish (and, in Celan's extended meaning, the human) community, is bound up with a spirituality of a very particular sort—a *terrestrial* spirituality, which bridges the distinction between matter and spirit.

IN THE AIR, that's where your root remains,
in the air.
Where the Earthly conglomerates,
Breath-and-Clay.

This is not to be confused with the "return to the soil" or the "return to nature" in the primitivistic sense of an attempt to sink back into a preconscious state: here Earth itself as it were helps humanity to reach a consciousness so clear it is painful. In "Ice, Eden" the "eye-child" "sees, for it has eyes/that are bright earths." Moreover, the consciousness of earth is an ethical consciousness. In the poem "Huhediblu," we hear

the axis-tone deep
inside our star-round dwelling-place
Contrition? For
nevertheless it does move, in the heart's direction.

This recalls Galileo's famous under-the-breath retort—"Eppur si muove." Here, it is as if Celan sees in the earth's behavior, which conforms to physical laws, something which will eventually compel humans to repentance. In a letter to a friend written in 1962, Celan quotes a say-

ing by Kepler which he "met" on his return from Darmstadt, where he gave the "Meridian" speech: "God is symbolized by the sphere. The cross-section of the sphere is the circle. This circle is man." And in the letter Celan adds: "Yes, it exists, this circle. Long live the Meridian!" If for Kepler the sphere could represent God by virtue of its geometric perfection, for Celan this form was probably significant as the form of our "dwelling-place." Form means law and necessity, but it can also inspire love. In this perspective aesthetics becomes an inseparable part of ethics; it is nothing other than the search for the "constellation," as Celan says in "Booth Window," which we need "in order to dwell, here, among humans." Thus in *Die Niemandsrose* the language of earth is no longer "a language without I and without You," but rather: "Language, language. Fellow-star. Neighbor-earth." As we saw in "Crowned Out," erotic love is also connected with language, with the attempt to awaken the "you" to a consciousness of the global situation.

This effort is one of the main themes of the following collection, *Atemwende* ("Breath-turning," 1967).

ERUPTION OF WORDS, volcanic,
sea's rush above it.

overhead
the mob at flood
of anti-creatures: it
signalled—copy and counterfeit
cruise vainly timeward.

Until you hurl forth
the word-moon whereby
the wonder of ebb-tide is worked,
and the heart-
shaped crater,
  naked, bears witness
for the beginnings, the royal
births.

Here the "you" is identical with the earth; but it is a thinking earth, it must "hurl forth the word-moon" which will influence the "mob" of humans who, once made in the image (Ebenbild) of God, have become

mere "copy and counterfeit" (Abbild und Nachbild). In *Atemwende,* still more than in previous collections, there is an awareness that the poet's work is not complete in itself, that he is waiting for a response, for a continuation of his speech on the part of his hearers, that there are thoughts which are scarcely thinkable by one mind alone. And will the answer he is waiting for arrive at last?

> Huge as the apple of the world, the tear beside you,
> shot through with noises, rushings
> of answer,
> answer,
> answer.

The poem in which these words appear, "Give the Word" (title in English) opens with a quotation from King Lear, "Cut to the brains" (ins Hirn gehaun). Solitude, disorientation. "Where did the earth fall to?" At times the poet seems to be wandering in space, unable to find the way home.

If we take the image of Earth as a kind of touchstone of Celan's work, the feeling is strengthened that—as Celan himself felt, according to the testimony of friends in Israel—in the *Meridian* and *Die Niemandsrose* he expressed his fundamental vision, and in the five collections which he wrote afterward could only repeat his appeal to his hearers, invent variations—and make poetry, at last, out of the feeling that from here the road leads to nowhere. Among the last poems he wrote is one that begins: "Anointed away, outside," and ends "Under the left foot/a window—of/Earth?" This brief poem is little more than a repetition of "Crowned Out"—a faint and despairing repetition. In this poem there is no meeting in space, and no one to help him pull the earth upward; there is only "a window—of Earth?"—of a house not to be reentered. The way is lost; the end is known.

And yet not quite the end. For a continuation of the way of the *Meridian* and *Die Niemandsrose* is possible if, in reading and studying Celan's work, one recognizes the obligation, not only to admire and to analyze, but to respond as a human being to whom a plea has been addressed, and to seek out others who have done or might do the same. This essay itself is meant not merely as an analysis, but as a declaration

of allegiance to the poet's view, as a plea for association, and as a statement of faith that if we, the readers, can accept the obligations Celan's poetry seeks to lay on us with all their consequences, we will be able to look on Earth with new eyes, and to awaken the consciousness of Earth in the soul of humankind.

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1. Unless otherwise noted, translations from Celan are my own.
2. "Tropen" in German means both "tropics" and "tropes."

Richard Exner

PAUL CELAN'S *ATEMWENDE:* ABOUT THE "DEATH OF SPEECH" AND THE "HOPE OF SILENCE"

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

"Place those words in the dead man's grave
which he spoke in order to live."

Paul Celan: "In Memory of Paul Eluard"

In his recollections of Paul Celan, the Rumanian poet and translator Petre Solomon (born 1923) quotes an essay by René Wintzen in *Le Monde.* After emphasizing the theme of "Forgetting and Remembering" in Celan's oeuvre—constantly, and often inappropriately stressed by critics—Wintzen observes that the recurrence of the theme of death in every single volume of poetry ultimately leads us to the inevitable insight, "It is a death of mankind that gradually becomes a death of language."

Studies of Celan have proliferated in the last thirty years. Next to Rilke, he is doubtlessly the poet about whom the most has been written. A major portion of this literature addresses the concept of negative poetics, of silence and speechlessness. And it is my theme as well, because I am convinced that Celan's death marks the conclusion of an epistemological act that has been "reversed": the recognition that occurs and is experienced through language is suspended by a gradual falling silent and by a renunciation of normal language. "Silence" and "speechlessness" should not be misunderstood here: Sieghild Bogumil correctly points out, particularly in the second half of her essay "Celan's Roving in the Word" (1983), that Celan was not interested in speechlessness itself, but rather in "that which is silent in language because it is repressed, not expressed, or subject to taboo." As Bogumil concludes, a new language

arises as such, a statement I will not dispute, and I definitely object to her thesis that art and nature are reconciled in Celan. An example from contemporary American poetry demonstrates the sense of reconciliation between language and art that the "Death of Speech" and the "Hope of Silence" signify.

In spite of sustained productivity following publication of *Atemwende* ("Breath-turning," 1967), we can identify an increasing tendency—as much consciously as unconsciously controlled—toward brevity, alienation, hermetization, and decontextualization of lyrical language and its metaphoric. In Celan, it concerns, I believe, the *German* language: not just any language. It represents the act of undermining one's own and the recipient's comprehension, of bringing that which is historically and personally understood and known to a halt ("zum Stocken"). An act is rendered incomprehensible; it is disassociated, and thereby becomes retroactively impossible. The absolutely unachievable is attempted: i.e. obliteration and making-undone, by the successive revocation of the very language in which the act was executed. This is *one* complication in all Holocaust literature, and it is particularly—and, due to its inefficacy—the absolutely tragic theme, the *condition créatice* of the writing person Paul Celan. In brief, from legend and myth we know that through the word and through language creation took place. Thus the world was formed and since that time words and language have brought creation and life to a standstill, even to annihilation. Neither speaking not silence, deciphering nor muteness can extinguish this knowledge. The "Death of Speech" and the "Hope of Silence" are, I believe, no longer interchangeable today, though that was not always true. I will briefly provide a context.

Long before the period of romanticism, but particularly during the romantic age, the "Hope of Silence," which was the single and unavoidable result of the "Death of Speech," affected the *carmina non prius audita,* those menages bestowed upon man by nature, which stir in dreams that remain inaudible "until our noisy delights slip into silence." Toward the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, this silence became more and more insistent, its expression and iconization ever more refined. Those territories bordering on language, those domains of silence placed along the edges of mute-

ness, of light and music (after George Steiner in *Language and Silence*) were surveyed. Illustrious authors have contributed to the literature about silence and about languages of the dead and of angels, about the language of fish and the domains "where what would be the language of fish/is spoken without them" (Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* II, 20): Thomas Mann, Kafka, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, and, finally—and, essentially, Celan himself—within this same European context we find Dante and Keats, Mallarmé, and Mandelstam.

But not until the nineteenth century did these "ditties of no tune," inscribed upon lamps and urns, ring on—and for an inner organ surpassing the "sensual ear." In the twentieth century those romantic *carmina* actually become an unheard-of series of sounds: the words nothing but rents in the cloth of silence (Ungaretti), nothing but proof of a destructive, a fragmenting force. Mallarmé translated such rents into a poetry of concealment, into a reduction of speech unique for his age; these "statements" of a basically unpretentious poet of our century, for whom writing was "une tache de caractère unique," were circumscribed as "envol tacite d'abstraction"—the accent certainly resting upon "tacite." This sentence continues and, to ears trained in modern German poetry, sounds very Rilkean indeed: writing and music follow that "préalable disjonction," if only in order to avoid small talk. In thinking of the distilled poem-title "Sainte" from "Ste Cécile jouant sur l'aile d'un Chérubin," of that "musicienne du silence," the ideal poem, "le poème tu, aux blancs" has become almost sheer ellipsis; that which is empirically evident has been destroyed—even before being expressed linguistically (*anéanti*). Poetic discourse, structured speech, has entered the domain of the uninhabitable ("pure, gigantic"—in Rilke) in the verse of Mallarmé. In the poem "Jetzt wär es Zeit" ("Now time has come," 1925), Rilke speaks of the gods, stepping out from inhabited objects, who should break down the walls of his house so that the wind could plough the air into a new breathfield. In that new "breath-field" the gong sounds, "an eternal light in the crypt of the palate" ("Idol"), a "sound, no longer measurable/with the sense of hearing," "Sum of the Silent." Let us go back to the year 1909, to the Malte period with Rilke in order to anticipate the transition to Celan: there, the uninhabitable domain is described as "nocturnal and never-structured space," and, half a century later,

Celan, in his middle period, attempted to similarly encompass with words what had occurred there: Rilke said, "from my dungeon's walls silence precipitates/not that of violins,/silence of cries plunge beside me and as ashes/endlessly rains from the arched vaults."

But, before we refer to the "Death of Speech" as synonymous with the "Hope of Silence," as the cessation of all life (—and thus a destructive force—), let us cast a quick glance at "The Silence," a contemporary American poem by Wendell Berry. This text, at first glance a postmodernist retake of Eichendorff's poem "Once the loud delight of men is muted, silent earth stirs as in dreams," reveals itself instead as a conscious break with the ideals and ideologies of Western civilization. Just as the poet and theoretician Jerome Rothenberg—in his anthology *Technicians of the Sacred*—traces in their sounds the significance of earlier songs, rather than in a logic derived linguistically, proposing that meaning lies in the rhythm of the sound and the interposed pauses, Berry prefers to view our poetic language—and not only the poetic—as separable from the context familiar to us: the speech act is considered capable of overcoming chaos. A cosmically ascending utterance is exemplified as a concept of speech, requiring that language actively participate in life. These are Eastern concepts, toward which the longing of the romantics was once directed. Significant for Berry is the "participant," the "participatory silence" partaking of creation in Zen meditation, a silence suffusing the lightly populated or deserted oriental landscapes, projecting itself as the essence of poetic language. This language, however, is not a fundamentally Western, i.e., propositional, force-exerting language of assertion, one which *seizes* and *dominates* its subject, and, as feared by poets like Berry or Gary Snyder, robbing natural objects of their force of expression. On the contrary, these natural objects are capable of speech. Our system of language values and evaluations destroys the presence of natural things. These objects produce their own sound, their own song—Rilke would say: produce not names, but rather orphic songs—and the poem is therefore no longer a text that names and signifies, but something that is concurrently root and rhythmically bobbing divining rod, capable of taking soundings, able to plumb the depths. These sounds, these non-verbalities in the linguistic sense take the "Death of Speech" for granted, just as the romantics would have had it. Threats to the envi-

ronment and the fatally upset balance of the forces of nature introduce the 'sound,' which eliminates the maenadic tearing-to-shreds, that "préalable disjonction," the dualistic and dialectic mode of thought and which raises in its stead this sound, so that harmonious participation and re-membering can take place. Here is Berry's text:

THE SILENCE

Though the air is full of singing
my head is loud
with the labor of words.

Though the season is rich
with fruit, my tongue
hungers for the sweet of speech.

Though the beech is golden
I cannot stand beside it
mute, but must say

"It is golden," while the leaves
stir and fall with a sound
that is not a name.

It is in the silence
that my hope is, and my aim.
A song whose lines

I cannot make or sing
sounds men's silence
like a root. Let me say

and not mourn: the world
lives in the death of speech
and sings there.

from *The Country of Marriage: Poems 1971-1973*

In our own days, an "orphic song" stems from purely ecological necessity and desperate conviction and contains, as the first sonnet to Orpheus states, "new beginning, trace, and transfiguration." But now back to the "dungeon" and to the "nocturnal" and to Paul Celan. Critics of Celan, countless times and from dozens of positions, have pointed out contractions, particles of negation, contrapunctal and contextual terms, diluted linguistic content, inversions from above and below, in individual interpretations and in comprehensive studies: Meinecke, Neumann, Buhr, Gadamer, Stewart, Burger, Schulz, Weinrich, Prawer, Lyon, Glenn, Weissenberger—(each list involuntarily and inadmissibly omits additional names). There is not another oeuvre in modern literature, I believe, whose creator has similarly challenged criticism and each and every reader. European history, the German language and his own personal history have denied Paul Celan that crossing-over into realms governed by speechless language (in silence, in music). Rilke, by comparison, accomplished this crossing-over with obvious pleasure. As withdrawn as the Rilkean hymns "To Music" (January, 1918) or "The One Who Sleeps" (December, 1925) may strike us, in the context of Celan's oeuvre, they would represent pure jubilation. What propels Celan's verse and what it represents (to an equal extent, one is tempted to say) are the poetic traditions of which he is a part, and his own biography, phylogenesis and ontogenesis in one, which intersects this chain of tradition; and at these intersections we find the texts, whose affinity to Mallarmé and the post-Mallarmé tradition, including such phenomena as surrealism and concrete poetry, and their cancellation *and* preservation in biography can be taken for granted. One should not forget that criticism draws from a text not only a clarification of the possible, but also and foremost whatever renders this text *tolerable,* rather than merely *comprehensible.* This pertains not only to interpretations of poems such as "Weggebeizt" ("Etched Away") or "Einmal" ("Once") or the series "Tiefimschnee-Iefimnee-Iie" (Deepinsnoweepinow-eio")—but is just as true for *Death in Venice.*

Or, in other words, that which Rilke has called the "silence of screams." We shall briefly examine this "Death of Speech" in several texts from *Atemwende* and in Alleman's "broadest possible" autobiographical sense. We are concerned with texts such as those indicated in

the poem "Fadensonnen" (Thread-suns") that seem "to sing beyond/ mankind," in the sense, then, of texts to be sung outside an historical (contemporary) context, not songs, but at most "singable remainders," twofold delineations of what broke through the sickle-script, far off in the domain of snow, something "interdicted lips," (literally, "lips with the mouth removed"—this is only one of Celan's many "disembodying" metaphors) which report what occurred only once and a long time ago, something that *was* light and could have meant rescue, just because it *was* once; now, however, *it is not.* These are things robbed of value which are "nothinged" by expression, as this neologism from "Weggebeizt" would have it.

Individual observations and interpretations seem to be inadequate in Celan's case, more so that in other modern poets. Basically they prove unreliable because each poem appears autonomous in itself, and the entire oeuvre is a single poem, as it were, with a field of associations and vehicles of meaning that both camouflage and reveal. That which can be gleaned from a reading of "Weggebeizt" can also be inferred for similar poems in the extremely carefully composed volume, for the volume itself, and even beyond, into the entire oeuvre. The frozen state of "Weggebeizt," the reduction of the written text *per se* to an ice crystal (of the genuine or the mendacious poem, or of writing altogether) is *also* an attempt to silence language, i.e., the *German language,* to make language mute from within: e-i-o. What remains is a crystal of breath that, although inorganic, seems biologically capable of reproduction. It becomes the material for speech, which is frozen in purity, virginal, untouched by the Holocaust, and, more importantly, untouched by those who, with and through their language, had set the Holocaust in motion. This is language attempting to be "pure" poetry, if such a reduction to one crystal of breath were possible. But (and one almost hears Kafka's voice from "An Imperial Message") never, never will this take place and, if it did, nothing would be gained, because language would again become contaminated.

Thus the "Atemkristall" signifies salvation, a rescue which, as it is spelled out, denotes salvation, but, in its hypothetical context, cannot be salvation. It is therefore a rescue of which the reader, perhaps even the author, holds the hope that it exists, such as Thomas Mann's high "g" in

Doctor Faustus. It controls his behavior, as if it existed, though it does not. The proof, the crystal, the one waiting, the final witness is unimpeachable, immovable, and therefore the reader of this poetry is doomed to wait. Unimpeachable, since it is not-yet-language, unimpeachable, since, as immovable ice it can not be done away with, and it is also unimpeachable in the sense of 'irrevocable.'' One is tempted to identify a dualism in the texts mentioned: destroyed/salvation; singable remainder/interdicted lip—a dualism or even a dialectic, or perhaps even the structure of chiasma (the organic and the inorganic overlap in honeycomb/ice and breath/crystal). But this is a deceptive temptation. In a very late poem, Celan says: "as though without us we could be we"—another statement of disembodiment. As if we could, one is tempted to say, speak a language without language. But we cannot. It is of little consequence whether this meta-language which turns what we say into "no-ems" belongs to God, to the self-aware poet, or to this century's nuclearly "radiant wind." Time-crevasse, sickle-script, snow, ice, darkness (actually an almost random series!) are the elements of a suicidal rhetoric of silence (George Steiner), of a rhetoric by which language 'disembodies' itself.

As this suicidal rhetoric becomes more pervasive, almost narcotically melodic in *Mohn und Gedächtnis* ("Poppy and Memory"), haltingly and almost shrill in later volumes—the collapse in the poet's house of language has become predictable: particles of negation, reductions, negations from object to nonentity; the demolished corpuscles of speech take over: literally and figuratively, cohesive language stops at the point where human communication ceases. As in Revelations, in the Apocalypse, creation and destruction converge and reciprocally cancel each other out. Linguistic crises, mis-understandings, normally used to be the ingredients of comedy, in refined or crude fashion, or at least of tragicomedy. But in the Holocaust, not only individual communication, but also the potential for all kinds of communication has perished in the flames. We are not dealing with a misapprehension of whatever origin, extreme or grotesque. Those speaking do not hold anything back. They are not silent by choice; they are forced into muteness because they have been murdered—"ent-mündigt"—deprived of a mouth, of speech in the ultimate sense. After this insight, which is thematized particularly in

Atemwende, after such a "Death of Speech," how did Celan continue to write? I am prepared to face contradiction, even ridicule, but will assert that he did *not* continue to write—not in the sense that one can *continue to write.* But he wrote. He wrote and knew that nothing that he had experienced historically and linguistically could ever be encoded in comprehensible linguistic symbols. In this one sense and specifically for this poet, Adorno's view that, after Auschwitz, it has indeed become impossible to write poetry, takes on frightful authenticity.

Once language has been thus undermined syntactically, grammatically, and semantically, once speech has died and has taken on the image of decapitated interpersonal communication, an author is naturally deprived of exactly that, which Dante, Eichendorff, Keats, even the late Rilke, Berry, and Snyder drew from the "Hope of Silence": life itself. This is not a frivolous statement. I believe that poetry, even the translation of foreign poetry meant more to Celan than to any other modern poet. It is language which reminds us of what has come into the world through language. For Celan this was the individual and the thousandfold death, the Holocaust. Through language he attempted to remember it and, at the same time, to remove it from all memory, so that the world could continue. The event proved ineradicable, however, and language itself, by means of which it could be eradicated, is, despite all hermetization, hebraization, decontextualization, and reduction to sickle-texts, just as ineradicable.

How easy it would be and, in the final analysis, how comforting if, in a text such as the "Eden" poem, or the "Berlin" poem, "Du liegst" ("You lie"), which first appeared in the Nachlass, but had previously been published in honor of Peter Huchel, a text which breaks off and "halts" ("stockt") because all that *should* come to a halt continues, how easy it would be if that deceptively obvious dialectic between good and evil, between the catastrophic and the Christmas-like, the murderous and the lovely could be substantiated.

YOU LIE in the great hearing,
bushed in, snowed in.

Go to the Spree, go to the Havel,
go to the butcher hooks,

to the red apple stakes
from Sweden—

Here comes the table laden with gifts,
he turns the corner of an Eden—

The man became a sieve, the woman
had to swim, the sow,
for herself, for no one, for everyone—

The Landwehrkanal won't roar
Nothing
stops.

(Tr. Pierre Joris)

"Du liegst" is the text which Peter Szondi selected to prove decisively what must be known about a poem and what not, and to what extent autobiographical material influences interpretation of the poem in which it participates. But our uninterruptable reading, guided and confirmed by Szondi, shows that everything mentioned, even "das Gastliche" ("the Hospitable"), as in "Weggebeizt," is totally murderous; Plötzensee, the "Hotel" Eden, nowadays a residential paradise that played a role in the history of Karl Liebknecht's and Rosa Luxemburg's assassinations; to that we add the man shot full of holes and the woman's corpse floating in the *Landwehrkanal,* and the Christmas fairs luminously benevolent, but later "butcher hook" apple-red and the apple stakes themselves that turn into pales. Szondi did not complete his study; he wrote it between April and September of 1971, and in October 1971 he took his own life.

Let us take a final look at the formidable unity of this Celanian oeuvre which poets from other languages, aided by at best precarious translations, experience as an erratic block. I am thinking, for example, of Jed Rasula's commentary in the Celan issue, edited by James Lyon, of *Studies in 20th Century Literature* (VIII, 1983). There it is asserted that Celan has made use of the German language as if it were an instrument of terror. Celan wrote in German as a Rumanian residing in France. Through understated linguistic gestures he expressed his affinity with the victims of the Holocaust and executed, as it were, language from the

inside out. He has consciously, as Rasula asserts, overseen and practiced the syntactic disintegration of the German language. Language matter thus vanished in direct proportion to his growing fame. In Celan's hands the German language became the instrument of its own disembodiment. Little by little, it went up in smoke. Rasula completes this progression of thoughts with the words, "Nothing similar exists in any language known to me." And so we face the "Death of Speech" *without* the "Hope of Silence."

Every poem as a potentially final word: in 1960, almost seven years prior to the unimpeachable proof of the breath-crystal in *Atemwende,* Marie Luise Kashnitz ended her Büchner Prize citation for Paul Celan with a quotation from an early poem, "We were dead and could breathe." It was almost a prophecy. These lines come from the volume *Mohn und Gedächtnis;* the title of the text itself "Memories of France," has taken on a gruesome authenticity since Celan drowned himself in the Seine. We were dead and could breathe: that is the connection with "In Memory of Paul Eluard," and that is the chiasmus of the "breath-crystal," of the "honeycomb ice," of the "interdicted lips"; a chiasmus found also in Hölderlin, whom Celan frequently remembered and cited. Here biography and tradition seem to merge and intersect in the context of two centuries. Hölderlin's text "In lieblicher Bläue" ("In lovely Blueness") concludes: "Life is death, and death is another form of life"—"Leben ist Tod, und Tod ist auch ein Leben."

PAUL CELAN

Celan's writing is one of the clear, unarguable limits of modern poetry. In all its facets it composes one single sign, a solid piece of rock bearing the inscription, "Past this point your language disintegrates from anguish." Its relation to a broader tradition of European nihilism is minimal, as Celan's work is closest to the tiny gestures—the shrug, the loose wave of a hand—that indicate with awesome peremptoriness "this one lives, that one dies." Except for a few of the earlier poems there are not even cries of anguish or lament. The later work shows Celan conscientiously applying himself to the German language as an instrument, as though it were an instrument since it has been used as such, of terror. He elected to write in German, while being Rumanian and living in France, because his affinities with the victims of the Holocaust declared themselves most explicitly in the smaller linguistic gestures with which he *executed* the language from within. His work is radical insofar as it is a helpless conscious choice. Very few writers have so openly allowed the language of their poems to be helpless, to be written from a condition of abrupt syntactic disintegration *consciously* attended to. The great difficulty—and thus his greatest example for later poets—is in practicing a craft on material that disappears in proportion to the success of the poet. Celan's invasion of the German language is only possible after the Second World War. The First had incited violence of a different kind; the medium, the language, was a means and not the object of attack. With Celan, the German language itself becomes the means of its own disembodiment. In his hands, more and more of the language simply goes up in smoke. There is nothing at all like it in any other language that I know of.

There is certainly nothing to compare with it in English. For all the interesting graphic propositions (still largely unexamined) in cummings, there is no ground for comparison. Jack Spicer's abandonment to the

pronoun disfigurations of an Orphic underworld are comparable only in isolated lines. And so far as I can discern, the work of the younger poets publishing in the magazines *This, Hills* and *L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E* shows no indebtedness to Celan, though some of their polemic suggests he would be central to their concerns. I suspect the lack of absorption of Celan into American idioms and attentions arises from a simple enough error, which is the assumption that every notable poet has some kind of "equivalent" in another language. So the most profuse records of verbal injury in such poets as Vallejo and Artaud possibly disguise the distinctness which is Celan's. It may also be that Celan is not fun to read. His poetry may be the most singular contemporary instance of the harrowing, unreadable, prototypical "modern poem" that had manifestations for earlier sensibilities in such work as *The Waste Land,* Dada sound-poems and simultaneities, Expressionist works and more. The singularity of Celan's images, the sensual purity and the sense of hermetic or private meaning, also make his work less approachable in the richly imagistic public domain of American poetry.

In my own case, Celan was unavoidable. I lived in Germany in the late sixties, so the bias of my attentions was toward European poetry anyway. Rilke was then, and remains, for me, synonymous with the notion of German poetry. And what is most conspicuous for someone disposed to hold Rilke so highly is the fact that Celan's attraction to the German language is bilateral. On the one hand he is decomposing the language of the barbarians from within: on the other, he is conducting a hermetic (*tightly sealed*) passage toward the inviolable hieratic visionary language within German that Rilke made his own. It is as if Celan, in order to come into his own as the German poet after Rilke, could only approach the realm of such a practice by passing through many rings of enemy lines drawn around it. So Celan's work is full of stealth and intentional sabotage. And by the time—or in those instances in which—he is close on the Rilkean purity, the scars of what he has experienced en route peel off in scabs indistinguishable from the exaltation of being there. A prick from a rose killed Rilke. Celan writes as if an entire crown of roses were being held in place in his mouth. Beauty is bloody.

So the position of Celan is in the end twofold. He marks a certain boundary to horror, the response to horror in language, and the assimila-

tion of it in a poetic practice. On the other hand, he is always approaching a beauty which it is terrible to contemplate. This has been the substance of much melodramatic poetry and fiction, but Celan writes with the massive historical evidence pervasive in his chosen language and racial affiliations. And I would suggest that it was as a poet that he most clearly gravitated toward the holocaust as inevitable topos. Each slightest sound of German resonated with bone and ash. Suffocation the condition of the script. Every poem written as the last word, terminus of a race.

Clayton Eshleman

A NOTE ON PAUL CELAN

While living in Sherman Oaks, California, in the spring of 1970, I had the following dream: a man whom I recognized as Paul Celan walked to the bank of the Seine in Paris and stepped up on a stone which I also recognized as the Vallejo stone. Celan stood there for a moment—then leapt into the river.

When I mentioned my dream to someone a week or so later I was informed that the poet had just drowned in the Seine, an apparent suicide.

The Vallejo stone refers to a poem that César Vallejo wrote while living in Paris, in the mid-thirties. Like many of the poems that Vallejo wrote during these years, it records his acute sensitivity to suffering; this particular untitled poem is, on one level, a stay against suicide. Vallejo still believed that a humanitarian revolution would occur, but this belief was growing very weak, and was rapidly being overwhelmed by the suffering he found everywhere daily.

The poem, too long to quote in this context, opens with the following two stanzas:

> Idle on a stone,
> unemployed,
> scroungy, hair-raising,
> at the bank of the Seine, he comes and goes.
> Conscience then sprouts from the river,
> with the petiole and scratches of an avid tree;
> from the river the city rises and lowers, made of
> embraced wolves.
>
> The idle one sees it coming and going,
> monumental, carrying his fasts in his concave head,
> on his chest his purest lice
> and below

his little sound, that of his pelvis,
silent between two big decisions,
and below,
further down,
a paperscrap, a nail, a match...

One might think of this stone as a location at which lamentation is tested. Rilke, in the 10th "Duino Elegy," evokes the crisis of lamentation for the 20th century. This is where, as a young woman, a Lament responds to a young man's questions, saying:

"We were a great clan, once, we Laments. Our fathers
worked the mines in that mountain range. Sometimes
you'll find a polished lump of ancient sorrow among men,
or petrified rage from the slag of some old volcano.
Yes, that came from there. We used to be rich."

In attempting to read my dream in the light of Vallejo's and Celan's lives and poetries, I see that Vallejo, still weighted with some of the riches of lamentation, could address the misery of men from his stone pedestal in a poem and turn away from the river to other poems. For Celan, writing after Auschwitz, his family having been murdered in the camps, lamentation was not exactly empty, but was so distorted by the absurdity of praising anything, that its riches had been, in effect, undermined. It may be putting it too strongly to say that he could no longer, at a certain point, feel sorry for himself, but I suspect that something like this was true, and that it pushed him over the edge.

In the two quoted stanzas of Vallejo's poem, I find a curious balance between what the poet sees over the Seine and what he sees on its bottom; the "above" and the "below" seem to be held in this balance by his body, specifically by his genitals ("his little sound, that of his pelvis,/ silent between two big decisions,"). If we read "two big decisions" as "testicles," then "pelvis" reads as "penis." The sense seems to be that given the nature of the world, he cannot decide whether to have children or not and, caught on the horns of the decision, as it were, he remains "idle," out of work as a man as well as a worker.

The movement of words and lines in Celan's poetry from *Sprachgitter* (1959) on has a strong, twisting, downward propulsion, like strands

of a rope that is, at the same time, tightening with increasing weight *and* self-destructing through torsion into cast free strands. A good example of these contraries in motion is found in "The Syllable Ache" (from *Die Niemandsrose,* 1963) of which I quote the last half:

Forgotten grabbed
at To-be-forgotten, earthparts, heartparts
swam,
sank and swam. Columbus,
the time-
less in eye, the mother-
flower,
murdered masts and sails. All fares forth,
free,
discovering,
the compass-flower fades, point
by leafpoint, an ocean
blossomed to height and to day, in blacklight
of wildrudderstreaks. In coffins,
in urns, canopic jars
awoke the little children
Jasper, Agate, Amethyst—peoples,
stock and kin, a blind

Let there be

is knotted in
the serpentheaded free-
ropes—:

By modifying "*Let there be*" with "blind," freedom and license twist into each other, and for a moment Aleister Crowley's "Do what thou wilt" shows its lust-deformed face. By putting it that way I mean to indicate to what an extent Celan's poetry contains a pronouncement of creation emptied of meaning. When "Do what thou wilt" becomes the only law, there is no meaningful creation. God is exterminated, one is no one, unity equals nothingness.

On another level, Celan's contraries were "I" and "Thou," and in his mature poetry they grow unbearably close, closer than contraries can to function: one might say that they gnaw into each other, the living

become the dead, the dead the living, and out of such a conjunction a grand but terrifying vista opens, in which Celan's own voice is finally consumed in a "we" which is the living and the dead singing a song of praise to "no one." Under the stress of such a vision, nothing is forgotten: memories of the death camps, the inhuman rot in the mythic structure of Christianity, and insignificant slights have hundreds of low doors opening on each other. This can be a condition in which while poetry is meaningless the sense of soul-destruction is so gaping that only a poetry in which life itself is pulled inside out is a possible response.

I believe that in reading and thinking about Paul Celan today, we must meditate on the stamina of his wound. Not that he allowed it to flow at full vent, or that he brilliantly cicatrized it at the right hour. Rather, he worked it as a muscle as long as there was any strength in it. He knelt at its altar alone, and thus did not set other possibilities in motion that might have given him reasons to continue to live at the point that the wound ceased to ache.

Then there was only numbness—and the "uncontestable testimony" of one who did not come in to the hearth when the snow began to fall but stayed outside to disappear in the deepening particles of annihilated millions, a single "we" that you and I can pronounce.

The Vallejo translation from *César Vallejo: The Complete Posthumous Poetry,* tr. by Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia, 1978, pp. 78-81; the Rilke from *Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus,* tr. by A. Poulin, Jr., 1977, pp. 72-3; the Celan from *Caterpillar #8/9,* tr. by Cid Corman, 1969, pp. 17-18.

Erich Arendt

for Paul Celan

JEWISH CEMETERY IN PRAGUE

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

The roots inside
—withered. On the Mount of Olives
the shadow of death
impotent. Way of the cross:
unending: yours
and mine—yet
the seawing of
the word
still wanders.

Here, day-years gray,
the phantom, the
defoliated one, overhead
a listening. A wind
inaudible. Day-years
gray, the plaintive
vapor trail. Wind
as old as the darkening of
bark.
Under the day's eyelid still
ponder—
deeply,

for a long time stone, out of the ground
the brows of the dead
are growing: the Law's tablets
unbroken, brow upon brow,
scattered, bent by
the time-god, by
his wind. Legible there
the severe
lineature, heart-gray the Old:
the ineradicable Testament of
suffering, valid still,
according to which the gray
of your forehead,
final
sediment of the word.

Eyes you mouths
Eyes! Miriam
Yehuda, the sand
of your feet! Banished,
Consumed by fire!

Eyes mouths
of that which is written,
shadow trail of a
remembering, engraved,
eyeless here mouthless.
Dust siblings,
our fingers
read the names.

IN MEMORIAM PAUL CELAN

"My blonde mother did not come home."
—Paul Celan

Tr. by Carl Clifton Toliver

The mother, she
did not come home

never relinquished
death

nourished by the son
with black milk

that preserved his life
drowned
in ink blood

Between lines made mute
the non-word
radiant
in the void

ORADEA

In memory of Paul Celan

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

Of secondary sense
like an image: the day
that rises with the dandelion,
five-o-clock chimes
and snow in April
from Bukovina.

Coincidence strikes synchronically:
Someone here hammered out
allegro barbaro,
someone else played Romanzeros
for pale obese ladies.

The absurd life
a museum displays.
Someone else, monumentalized,
teaches us
how to ruin a poet's life with drink.

All that before your time:
not natural oil, not cybernetics,
not even Sarajevo,
no word
of Roth or Musil.

Good Friday for the Orthodox:
In Felixbad
the spa season begins
and six Rumanians
were discovered stabbed to death.

Six synagogues,
the city without Jews.
I am come to suffer—
in four languages.

And in the five-o-clock chiming:
dawn light and dandelions,
at the train station
a small defeated army
with passports
that now mean nothing.

The tar boilers
hardly looked up.
The flames shot skyward,
at their tips
smoke, sooty flakes
over the city.

Those surviving
driven into cities—
who calls them by name?
Water,
water—

patient and quiet, almost
uncomplaining.

Waves,
like lips,
broken:
No pasaran . . .

Hans-Jürgen Heise

PAUL CELAN

Tr. by Carl Clifton Toliver

He knocks his forehead
on the smoke
that he thinks
Too late
to flee the street
now
leisurely
one more time

LAMENT FOR PAUL CELAN

(On the death of my friend in Paris)

Set your flag at half-mast
Memory
at half-mast
for now and always
P.C.

Tr. by Suzanne Shipley Toliver

Days of sisal days of nylon
someone however spun silk spun silk
thin was the thread long was the thread
strong was the thread weak was the thread
from it hung a blackened weight

Tons of smoke smoke of blood
blazing flames flaming blaze
everywhere camps everywhere stairs
everywhere larvae everywhere silk
Israel everywhere

Someone disentwined the thread
was a cocoon of pain of pain
aching within aching without
words deworded torment terminated
lacerated
lacerated

PAUL CELAN

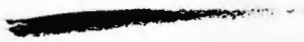
Tr. by Carl Clifton Toliver

a folksong
came most easily
to his lips
yet he never sang it

pumping,
jellyfish took over
his heart's activity

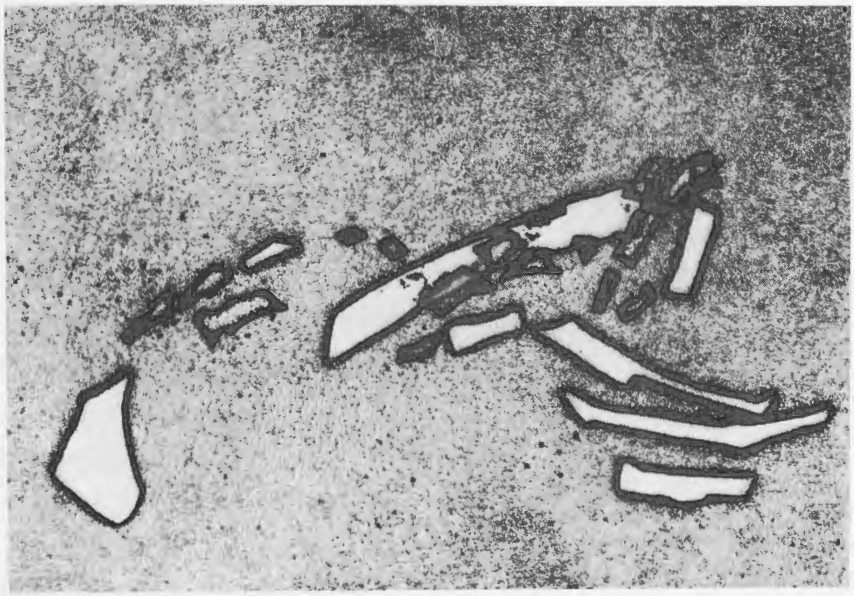
we had similar experiences:
mussels
would not snap open
stones
squirted out of our hands

beneath the waters' ice-fast surface
we were strangers
who were friends



Engraving from
Gravure de Schwarrmant
Edition Brunidor, 1969.

Engraving from
Gravure de Atemkristall
Edition Brunidor, 1965



Engraving from
Gravure de Schwarrmant
Edition Brunidor, 1969

Johannes Poethen

ORPHEUS

Translated from the German by James Phillips

Music out of snow
out of sand a dance step
a breath from out of ashes

onset of the stiffened wave
the sign of motion vanished
memories along the bottom of an urn—

thus I lay out tools of recollection
fold the day together
heave the void onto my shoulder.

Still the uproar of the body's breaking
the sweating of a foamy death

I wade on with an oarsman's terror through the riptide:

will it last
if suddenly I turn around
and open up a look for her

the song composed of all my loss?

Already far beyond the borders of humanity
the final sentence crumbles off
already far beyond the borders of a word.

Blood-steps inbetween the temples
eyes as two antennas feeling forward
testing caverns for her hearing

ear upon a lifeless shore

what I am
is empty all around her dying
so that death would perish here.

Suction in the pores unto oblivion
the surging inner forms of faces
forests breathing outlines where a whisper was
an icefield full of glassy fragrance
skin in numbed illumination
tastes like shadows.

Grave-chamber
workroom
built above the wounding expectations

there to screen her slow appearance
with the ceasing of the seventh echo
with the pouring out of imitations never finished.

Etched into the eyelid's shell
the shadow of
her voice

shivering in the calling light that moves him upward now

distorted in the roundness of
a humming flow

the draft of colors muted by such seeing.

Whom I had to shelter
dead upon arrival
in the emptied pitcher of my skin—

still I hold the forms out
testing that which fills

how to make a shell for humming
how to find the shadow's fleece
and have it shine?

So I look back as if forever
melt my failure in the fire of our perfected separation

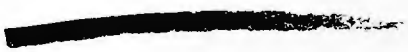
while she goes on disappearing

music out of snow
from far beyond all freezing.

Rescued in the body's trance
saved from suction in the pores
healed of waiting endlessly renewed

bled to life exchanged
against the thin composure of her brightness.

Johannes Poethen was born 1928 in Wickrath am Niederrhein. His most important collection of poetry is *Wohnstatt zwischen den Atemzugen* (A Dwelling Between Breaths), published in 1966.



John Yau

THE DRAWINGS OF PORFIRIO DiDONNA

Porfirio DiDonna began exhibiting in the early 1970's, a little more than a decade after Jasper Johns, Agnes Martin, and Frank Stella expressed an extreme disatisfaction with the directional brushwork and spatial ambiguities of the Abstract Expressionists, particularly de Kooning, Kline, and Pollock. DiDonna's early, largely monochromatic paintings are cumulative. His approach can be characterixed by the meticulous application of thin layers of paint; and in certain designated areas the process of building up was continued until horizontal rows of small rectangles projected discreetly from the painting's surface. Finally, dots in a different color either alternated with or punctuated the rows. The dots caused a slight optical shift, they were calculated to be a sensuous distraction.

In retrospect it can be said that DiDonn's paintings suggest a bravura sensibility (which is usually associated with Abstract Expressionism) was being circumscribed by a commitment to an austere, meditative geometry. The strength of this approach was that both sensibility and vocabulary were able, through DiDonn's precise manipulations, to refine each other in a way that emphasized the painting's tactile surfaces. What anchored these manipulations, prevented them from becoming merely effects, was DiDonna's reliance on a grid. The result of these manipulations was that the paintings quietly reminded us of the artist's hand, his touch.

Given these concerns, it is no surprise drawing has occupied a significant amount of DiDonna's attention. Between 1970 and 77 he completed thousands of them. Almost all were composed of dots and dashes. Using fairly small sheets of paper, DiDonna pencilled in row after row of dashes with the aid of a T-square. He then counterpointed this mechanical aspect with the less precise placement of the dots. At times the grid

suggests slippage, as if every mark were on the brink of losing its foothold. Until 1977 DiDonna explored the possibilities of the grid, placement, and duration with an obsessive thoroughness reminiscent of Mondrian. The difference is that Mondrian was concerned with essences, while DiDonna was looking for a way to make his self-imposed restrictions evolve.

At the same time, DiDonna was learning what was possible within these limitations, becoming familiar with the range of nuances he was capable of achieving when he placed a pencil against a sheet of paper. The marks are interruptions; they parallel the lozenges and dots projecting from the painting. As with the paintings, DiDonna was intent on getting a balance between the smallest mark and the overall pattern. Both the field of events and the individual instance are supposed to convey an authority. What he wanted to overcome, indeed deny, was the hierarchical aspects of traditional composition.

A dot-dash drawing, its interplay between the mechanical and the personal, parallels a score sheet for music. It has an internal, irreducible logic of its own—one that challenges the viewer. While the vocabulary was limited for almost 7 years, DiDonna eventually explored a variety of mediums, including pen and ink, charcoal, and watercolor. The restrictions he placed on himself allowed him to concentrate his attention elsewhere. By the mid 70's the drawings gained a luminosity. Charcoal was used not only to make a mark, but to produce a tactile, atmospheric effect.

Equally true is the drama the drawings of the last five years convey. What occurs is being performed, a fact that has been evident in DiDonna's approach since the beginning, only now more so. By breaking time down into precisely measured instances—dots and dashes—he was able to make his marks synonymous with events. The difference is that the earlier drawings presented a more or less uniform field of events. The measured passing of time is what confronts us, rather tha the map of an event. When we look at the recent drawings, we discover the relationships between the marks, the configuration of the field. The hints of space are like clues strewn on a stage. We reenact the drama of DiDonna's decisions, invent the outcome for ourselves.

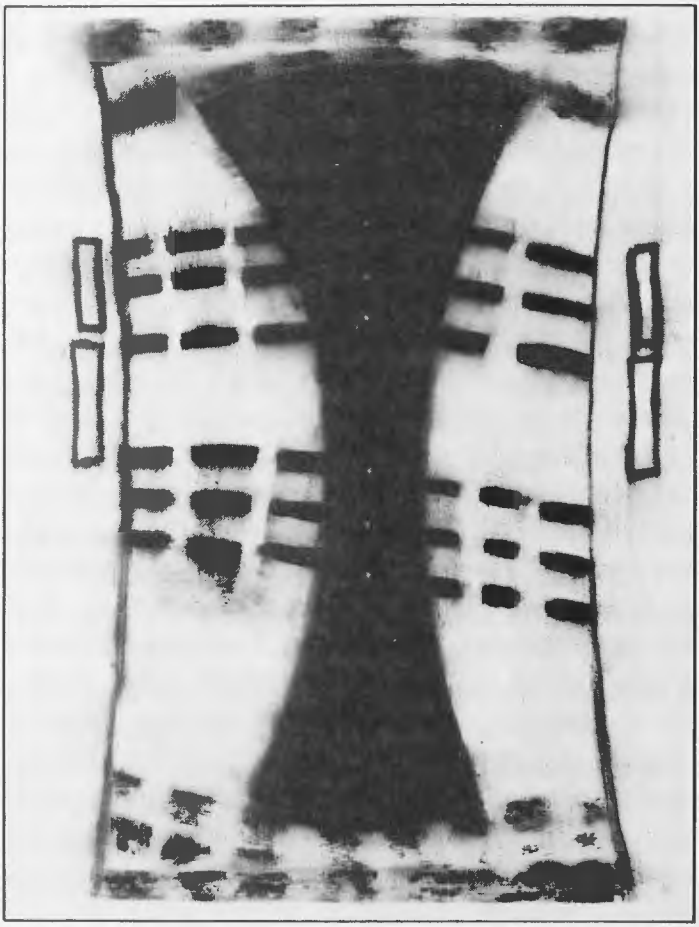
By exploring the range of patterns possible with a vocabulary lim-

ited to dots and dashes, DiDonna built up a huge storehouse of memories that would later prove useful. It is easy to believe these memories are always at work on some level when he begins a drawing now. They do not determine the outcome so much as they inform each decision. He has gained for himself a range of possibilities that must be discovered anew. Now, the overall patterns and iconic presences are built up from calligraphic marks and personalized shapes. Often the drawings have an allusive resonance, one recalling early Renaissance compositions, say, or ancient Chinese bronzes.

The transion from the early drawings to the more recent ones occurred in 1977, when DiDonna spent a summer at Ragdale, an artist colony outside Chicago. It was the first time he lived and worked outside of New York, where he was born. The vocabulary of the drawings began to change. The marks expanded rather swiftly into a calligraphic style. Pattern no longer dominated is approach. Rather, DiDonna began to explore the tension between symmetry and asymmetry on a deeper, richer level. One recalls the paintings of Piero della Francesca, Cimabue, and Giotto. The marks press into space without abolishing it. Always, one is conscious of the surface of the drawings, the elegant yet understated sensuousness that occurs in thick rag paper when it has been worked on again and again. Often, DiDonna washes away the charcoal with a wet rag and begins again. A layered, transparent space is the result.

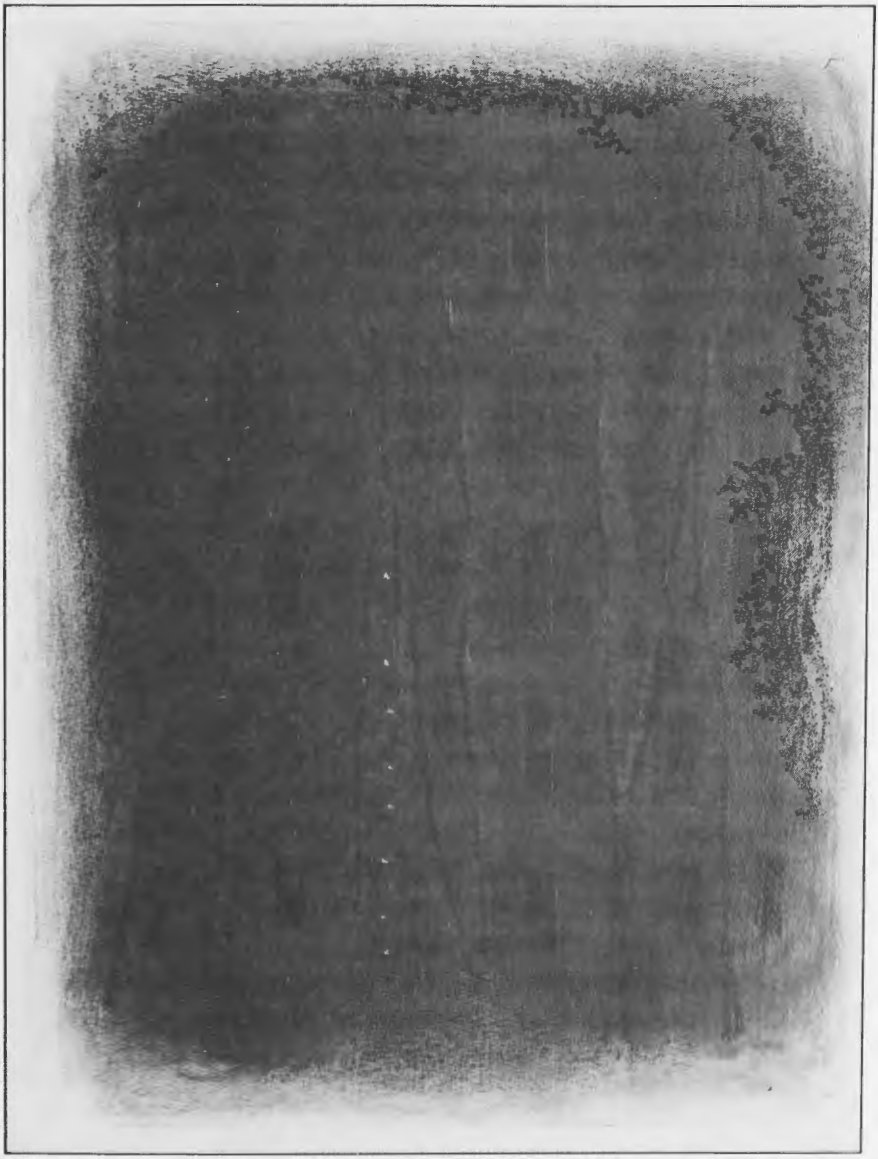
In his early drawings, DiDonna was obsessive to the point of being scientific in his thoroughness. It seemed as if no possibility could be overlooked. And yet, despite the very strong likelihood that he could have gotten stuck in an empty, ritualized activity, DiDonna moved on. Now, he is able to impart a sensuous weight to rarification, delicacy, opacity, and tone. Accent has as much force as statement. Blunt primitivism and elegant effects are inseparable. DiDonna's approach is still circumscribed. He never wants too much. Always respectful of the other—paper and mediums—his restraint conveys an intense eroticism.

PORFIRIO DiDONNA: *Four Drawings*

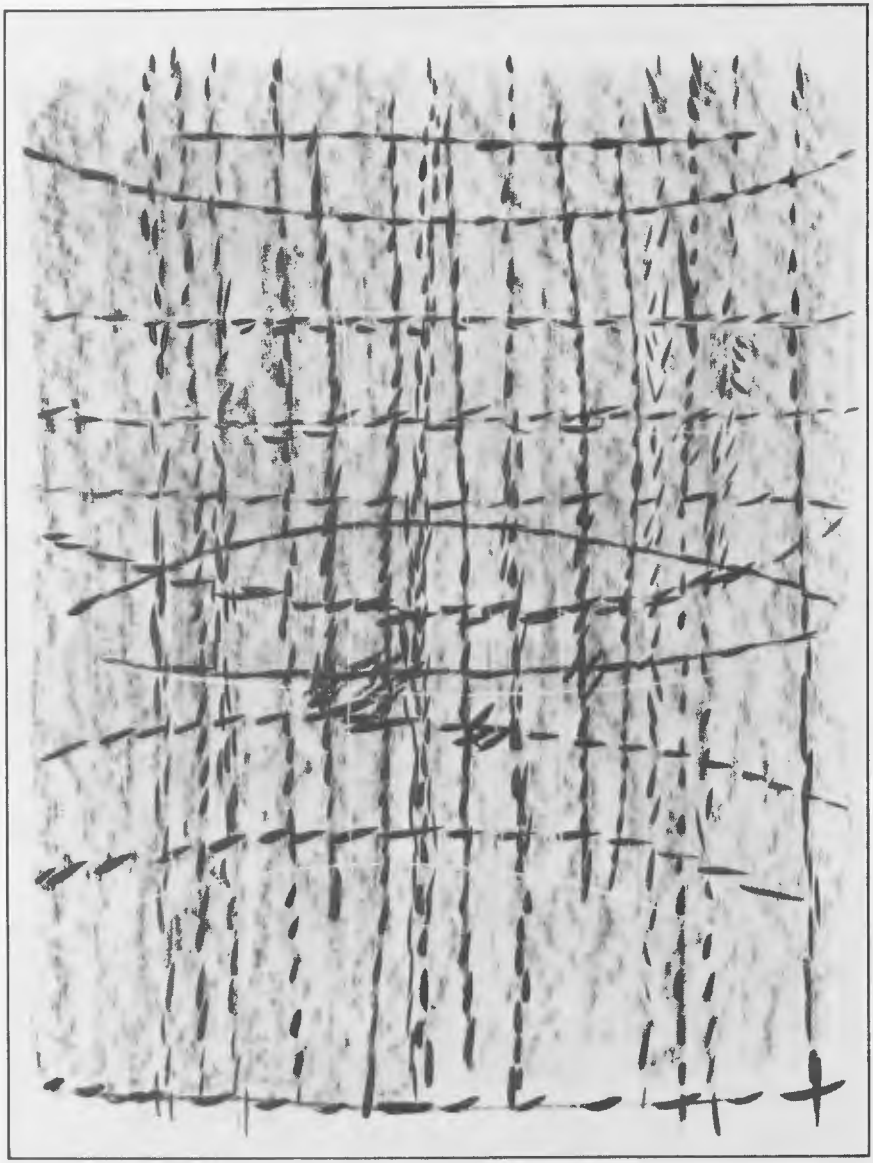


Untitled, 1981
mixed media, 35½ x 25"

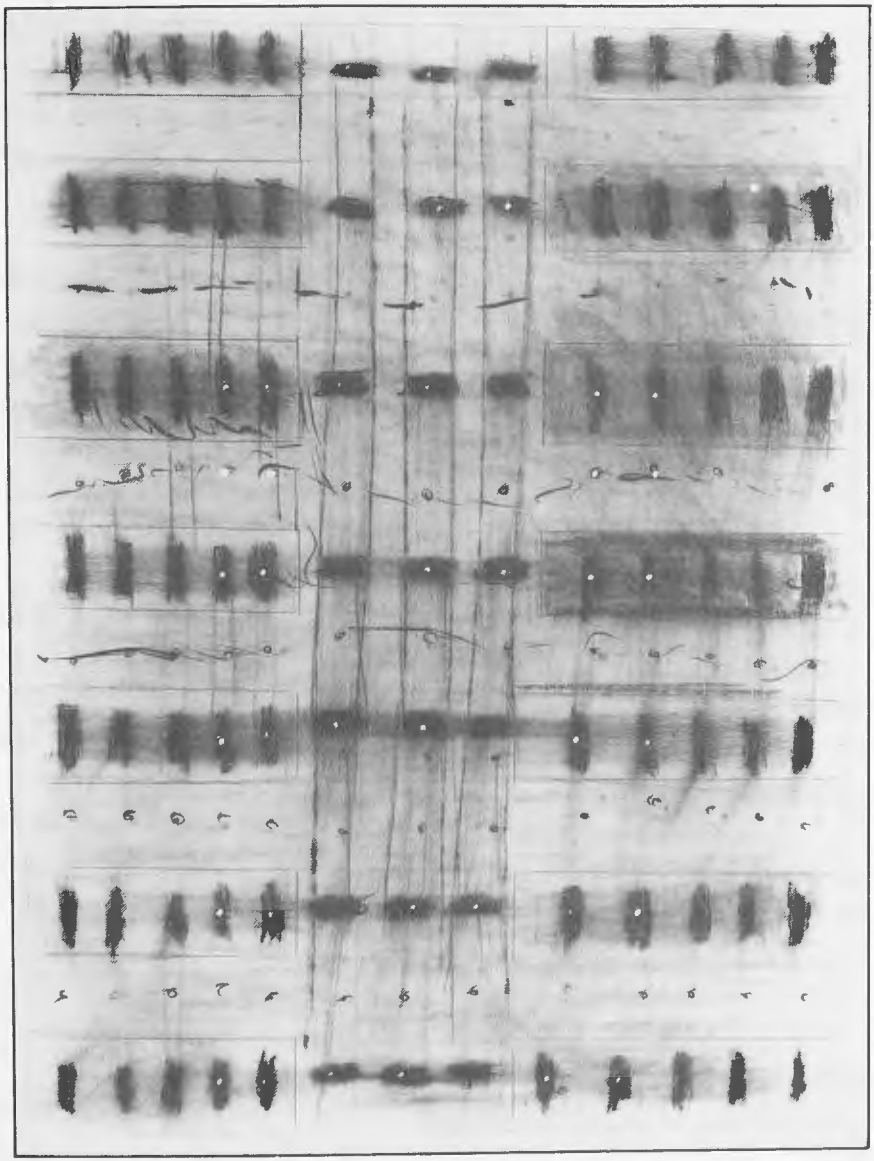
Photo credit: Zindman/Fremont courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery, NYC



Untitled, 1981
mixed media, 30 x 22¼"



Untitled, 1979
charcoal, chalk, & ink on paper,
30-1/8 x 22-7/8"



Untitled, 1979
charcoal, colored pencil, ink on paper
30 x 22-5/8"

UNTITLED

for David True

The peak of the obsidian mountain swarms
    with red snow, against grey lime sky
the mountain becomes negative, a dark entrance whose interior
    swarms with fire, or is this red
warning from an ancient goddess that the stuff of Adam
is now nearly totally transformed into warfare,
the perpetuation of life
                pulled inside out,
    an inner lining, extinction, shows now
    in the face of things...

At the base of this black mountain
in David True's "Untitled"
a chain of boulders, pieces of an enormous stone phallus
before the head of which a headless
    deer, eviscerated, lies on its back,
3 legs groping the air more like insect legs than animal,
as if a wheeling motion were implied, as if this dying
headless creature were struggling underneath
    the phallus,

a starved Pan looks beyond the deer
to a windowless house, poised on the highest of the phallus
pieces, about to slide—

*

The wheeling legs revolve, and set in motion
an inner meaning of the house, it is Pan's signal tower,
his alchemical workshop in which 14 red women recline
stroking their red fur, with their 28 legs propped on
the hub stone they become the animators of
the Grindstone of Desire, whose long red spokes churn
the Panic Satanic machinery in the faces of men—

yet Pan is famished here, the scene still, as if the workshop
is wall all the way through, it is
the weight in our sensing that as the animals become extinct,
the abyss recedes, as
the Bawean deer
the Cedros Island mule deer
the Columbian white-tailed deer
the hog deer
the key deer
the McNeill's deer
the musk deer leave,

the fructifying abyss, the *abaton,* where the power of the womb
crosses the power of the tomb, where the seeker curls
awaiting an incubus to deposit soul eggs in his side,

the grandeur of this emptiness draws further and further away

*

For a moment a clearing is constructed,
    brown ground, with our yearning for a golden age
rising in bands of lime and yellow light,

        and in the stillness of my own
not knowing where to turn,
I saw, boiling in the cornice of the sky,
the blood of a cauldron
whose sides are the embraced bodies of the living and the dead,

    the rage of the grail
to dissolve the watchfiends, the rackscreams,
back into that blood pudding
red Riding Hood's grandmother was stirring
    under the covers, when the animal
was the mucilage between "us" and "them."

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EDITING POSTMODERN TEXTS

The poets who flourished after the Second World War and who have come to be known by some as "postmodern," are no different from most of the world's writers who have ever lived. If it is good, their work lives on without them. It is taken up and passed down for others to share, practical heirlooms of the species, as palpable and definite as a crate of wrapped china. And while these poets continue to carry much of the responsibility for seeing that their writings survive intact, unchipped, and uncorrupted—at least through their lifetimes—sooner or later their work is entrusted to hands not their own. Yet these strange hands are not unguided or without principles, principles and methods that can be recognized and likewise passed along.

The selection of texts is only the most obvious of responsibilities for an editor. Rather, it is the establishment of texts in all their pristine trueness and "numinosity," in cases for which there is no other authority—most often, no living author—that may be an editor's most difficult and worthy responsibility. Such a task draws upon the full range of skills that makes an editor a critic and historian as well as a textual caretaker, even though the very nature of his method makes the editor (who can also be called a textual critic) reluctant to offer the same generalizations that

those other specialists share with readers at will.

The problems (and pleasures) of editing are present in all their variety in such a project as preparing for publication Charles Olson's poems, especially *The Maximus Poems,* that preeminent postmodern text.[1] Later, I will discuss the challenges in the published texts of John Wieners, to take just one other poet as example. Olson's poems are an excellent example for the discussion of editing procedures because the editor has every conceivable stage of a poem's physical existence available for consideration, from roughest draft to tape-recorded readings to corrected galleys and page proofs. There are poems in neatly revised typescripts, but also unique renditions in notoriously difficult handwriting; poems published by the poet himself and seen through successive printings under his direct supervision, and others never published during his lifetime. Some, like those of Emily Dickinson, were not even specifically authorized for publication; others were published a number of times, never twice alike. There are poems in which certain errors are accepted by the poet, where inconsistencies are tolerated, even encouraged; poems in multiple, unresolved versions; untitled poems, undated poems, perhaps even unfinished poems.

In preparing a definitive edition of a work such as *The Maximus Poems,* the editor first goes through the previously published texts for typographical errors. That is obvious enough, although not as simple as it sounds. In order to determine which are typographical lapses and which are intentional eccentricities, he finds it quickly necessary to consult the original manuscripts and proofs. It has to be established, for example, whether such occurrences on Olson's page as "discovera" for "discovered" (*Maximus* 89) or "urgeng" for "urging" (*Maximus* 235) were intended by the poet. It must be determined when a change represents an authorial decision or editorial imposition or a printer's inadvertance. Each step along the way is traced to discover where and when an error has crept in. The general procedure is backwards, from the published texts through the various stages of proofs to the original typescripts and holographs or handwritten manuscripts.

The surprising discovery, in the instance of Olson's poems, was the extent of error—a humbling experience, producing a general wariness. Of the seventy-seven *Maximus* poems first published separately, in maga-

zines and elsewhere, during the poet's lifetime, only fourteen appeared exactly the same in both the printed volumes and original manuscripts. Differences extended from omitted punctuation and altered spacing to misread words. At the same time, a preliminary survey of the posthumously published *Archaeologist of Morning* reveals at least seventy errors, including five in the poem in which the poet says, speaking of an edition of Melville's poetry, it "has so many carelessnesses in it that, as of this date, / it is quite necessary to do it over again" (*Archaeologist of Morning,* p. [35]). One might have been forewarned by revelations made concerning Pound's *Cantos,* a work of similar size and complexity to *Maximus.* In 1955, Guy Davenport reported in *The Pound Newsletter* 278 different lines between the 1948 New Directions edition of *The Cantos* and the 1954 Faber edition, raising ripples of consternation; and twenty-five years later, Barbara Eastman found 225 textual differences among the five printings of *The Cantos* from 1970 to 1975 alone.[2] The Olson scholar can be grateful there were far fewer printings of *Maximus* to deal with. As it is, there were over thirty discrepancies between the 1960 Jargon/Corinth edition and Cape Goliard's 1970 resetting, the version photographed for the California edition. These discrepancies ranged from irregularities in spacing and relatively understandable lapses such as "near" for "hear" or "fisherman" for "fishermen," to such grim marrings as "deathly mu-stick" for "mu-sick" and "infuriated" for "infatuated." With poetry as idiosyncratic and demanding as Olson's—like so many of the postmoderns's work, with its extensible forms and full range of content—every effort must be made to insure that what the reader sees is what the poet wrote.

Most treacherous, perhaps, is that demimonde of magazines, anthologies, broadsides and what booksellers and librarians call "ephemera"—the intermediate but often essential stage between original manuscript and collection in book form. In editing from magazines, all sorts of pitfalls may be present. There is the classic case where a bibliography of Olson's writings, which later served as the basis of selection for his collected poems outside the *Maximus* series, mistakenly attributed to Olson a poem written by another, due to inadequate identification of authors on the magazine's mimeographed page. The poem was consequently included in *Archaeologist of Morning,* although it was not until

the discrepancy was brought to light by an alert scholar working on the other poet, that it was made clear the poem previously ascribed to Olson was in fact by Canadian poet Raymond Souster.[3] The dangers are multifarious and prolific. Even in the case of a two-line *Maximus* poem (*Maximus* 422), there was corruption. A magazine editor varied the poet's original text, rearranging the line break to fit one of the poem's long lines more comfortably on the page, seemingly indifferent to the integrity of the text.[4]

Each act of reproducing a text represents a danger. There seems to be some natural resistance, a mummy's curse, the poem's—or the act's, the moment's—insistence that *it* is as unique in nature as a crystal. There is always the possibility that no two manuscripts can ever be the same. Without a photocopying machine, each act of transmittal—especially in poems of length—involves a kind of interference in a natural process, a literary Uncertainty Principle.[5] The immediate problem for the editor, without the living author as arbiter, is to determine which, if any, of the resulting changes are authorized, which are errors. Without the living author, only the original manuscripts and the poet's own corrected editions can serve as the final guides.

Olson himself was cognizant of the difficulties and procedural necessities of editing, and no doubt was sympathetic to the rigors of textual criticism as it has been traditionally practiced, especially the collation of texts. He wrote to himself on the night of June 11, 1966, among some fifty pages of notes accumulated while laboring over the proofs of a proposed edition of *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* (which had been printed from a typescript prepared with the help of Jeremy Prynne in Cambridge): "proofing itself *does* at least bring copy-errors . . . into view, and, checked by my *original* and by *xerox*—thus 4 versions have to be in hand: proofs / Prynne's / Xerox / original / (*also*—note—some magazine printings." His demands for an edition were very precise, although somewhat paradoxical and occasionally impossible to achieve, owing to the sheer mechanics of print (type size, spacing, and leading), the inescapable difficulties of transforming a handwritten or typewritten manuscript into a typeset text. As I have written elsewhere, Procrustes was the original printer.[6]

No change in a text can be made without a careful collation of all

available versions of that text. The following might serve as a quick checklist: holographic manuscripts, typescripts, carbon copies, photocopies, corrected proofsheets, correspondence relating to manuscripts and proofs, audiotapes and videotapes of the poet reading, computer tapes or disks, and all published versions, especially the poet's own copies, which may bear autograph corrections. Perhaps, even, every letter the poet wrote during the period in which the text in question could have been quoted—though this may be beyond the scale of practicality.[7]

In Olson's case, there was an abundance of materials to work with. For example, the poet prepared a complete typescript of *Maximus 1-10,* which he thoroughly overhauled and rewrote and then prepared a second typescript, from which the book was typeset. A comparison of this latter typescript with the proofs (of which there were two sets) indicates Olson made changes up to the last minute—all minor revisions, but evidence he assumed authorial control to the very end. His intentions were clear; he had no casual or careless relationship with his words as they were made public. Despite the improvisatory air of "Projective Verse" and the oral quality of much of the poetry, any reputation for heedlessness was an overgeneralization. In his later years, Olson rarely composed on the typewriter directly. His typescripts from the early 1960s on were almost all copies of holograph originals, as exact as the typewriter could make them. He wrote in 1966 to Robin Blaser, then editing the magazine *Pacific Nation,* on a typescript of "[to get the rituals straight . . ." (*Maximus* 556-57): "I have gone over this as well as typed it as carefully as type itself—& wld, if you shld accept it, ask you *please* to see that your printer(s) . . . obey *all spaces*—where it is on the page etc, as well as queer positions of lines & masses *and* DISPOSITIONS Left and R (!"[8]

An author's modus operandi is the single most important consideration in successful editing. Olson worked hard to get *Maximus IV, V, VI* just right. Practically every page of proofs has notes and directions to designer Barry Hall and to the printer concerning placement and spacing, with comments such as (speaking of "*A Later Note on Letter # 15,*" *Maximus* 249): "Barry, I have repasted this (to *try* to get some of the flatness the poem carries)," or at another point (*Maximus* 296): "*Barry*! This poem suffers so badly (from the double space of the Bembo [typeface]—plus no 'feeling' in the resetting proportionately, I can only beg

you to go back to the original—the mss. is one of the carefullest 'graphics' in the book—like a Webern score—and *please* do anything—everything you can to simply accomplish its equalization!" (Occasionally, there was praise such as—for *Maximus* 354—"*Perfectamente*! For this you surely get the Havana see gar!") As the poet wrote in a note elsewhere to himself concerning the poems, "It's all right to be difficult, but you can't be impossible."[9] He did allow certain inconsistencies, where the gain is questionable at best (spelling "eys" for "eyes" and "haveing" for "having" in *Maximus* 355) and which may cost a share of the reader's credulity. Other times, the eccentricity is a stroke of pure genius (or at least shareable whimsy) and an agreeable spirit of independence.

What form does error take? It can be as small to the eye as a hyphen. In the following lines, a dash or a hyphen may make a difference:

> the Genetic
> is Ma the Morphic
> is Pa the City is Mother-
>
> Polis, the Child-Made-Man-Woman is...
> MONOGENE...

With the hyphen, the pun on "Mother-Polis"/"metropolis" is accomplished; without it, as the lines appear in *Maximus IV, V, VI* (pp. [10]-[11]), the reader is forced to read "Polis" in apposition to "the Child-Made-Man-Woman" which follows. This reading in itself makes for an interesting interpretation, one not inconsistent with either this particular poem or the series as a whole, where the polis of Gloucester is the sum or developing product of its citizen men and women. The interpretation is hardly crucial to the poems at this stage in the epic, but certainly of some interest, since Olson's definition of a "polis" is always significant. How does a collation of texts clarify matters? When the poem was first published in the *Paris Review,* the line appeared without a hyphen or any other punctuation. On the other hand, a hyphen (or dash—the length is not clearly differentiable) was added by Olson in his copy of the magazine. The correction also appears in the original typescript sent Cape Goliard Press, in pencil and slightly longer than typed hyphens, so it was taken by the printer for an em dash rather than a hyphen and apparently

missed by Olson in the proofs. Extratextual knowledge of the poem and its sources necessitates a hyphen, however, since a passage from Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy,* quoting a Gnostic treatise in which the term "Mother-City" occurs, lies in the poem's immediate background.[10] Familiarity with such dimensions of the poem means a textual critic must be more than a good proofreader or even a copy editor. A copy editor raises such questions; the textual critic must answer them.

In highly allusive poems such as Olson's, extra care must be taken with names or unfamiliar foreign words. Typographical errors create sluiceways through which meaning drains. There is this passage from the start of "The Laughing Ones" (*Archaeologist of Morning,* p. [39]), which contains the simple transposition of "Tyro's" for "Troy's":

> they
> are the light-hearted races,
> enjoy nothing so much, obviously,
> as the cracking of skulls (Tyro's fields
> were covered with 'em...

Here, the reference to Troy is not merely ornamental but quite necessary to identify the poem's larger opening allusion. Who exactly might be the "laughing ones" of the title, those "light-hearted races"? What was intended by the poet to be a traditional-enough allusion to the heroic age or classical heroes in general, now becomes, as "Tyro," a less familiar reference, one requiring special knowledge—which the reader expects will be provided by the poem itself. To compound matters, there *was* a classical Tyro who could possibly be intended (assuming the word is no mere misprint for "Tyre," home of Olson's hero Maximus). Tyro was a Greek maiden who fell in love with the river Enipeus, often wandering along its banks (the Tyro's "fields" of the poem?), until taken advantage of by Poseidon, to whom she bore two sons. She also bore her uncle Sisyphus two sons, which she killed (the "cracking of skulls"?) when she discovered that he did not love her as much as he hated her father. Later, she married another uncle and bore him Aeson, father of Jason the Argonaut. It can be seen how quickly tangled the path begun with error grows.

What happens, however, when it is the poet himself who is confused, genuinely confused, even in manuscript, like Keats in "On First Look-

ing into Chapman's Homer" with his "stout Cortez" for "Balboa," or Olson in "When do poppies bloom . . ." (*Maximus* 550), with its confusion of Penelope for Persephone? Here is where Greg's distinction between substantives and accidentals surely prevails.[11] Who is the editor to deny an author's human nature? In Olson's case, perhaps it was a simple momentary lapse (there is only a single holograph manuscript, written straight out), an instant's auditory inattention (both names, Penelope and Persephone, somewhat rhyme). And had he been given the opportunity to correct the substitution, the poet might have, had circumstances permitted (the manuscript was published posthumously). On the other hand, he didn't, as he did in similar first drafts. Nor was the manuscript written with particular haste or fury. Instead, there is a measure of calm to the handwriting. And perhaps the substitution was even intended: since Odysseus has been a hero of the poems before that point, a prototype of Maximus, perhaps the poet is justified in substituting the ever-faithful wife for the lost bride who in turn, at least for each half year, is faithful in her own way.[12] The editor has no other choice, no other authority, than to accept what appears on the written page.

It is not always easy, what appears written on the page. There is the example of the poem "OCEANIA" (*Maximus* 538-44), written on what the poet pulled from his pockets under streetlamps late at night while leaning against a bridge railing.[13] A notebook entry a few days later reveals that Olson himself spent three hours "trying to piece together" what he had scribbled on the "remains of [a] checkbook." Needless to say, what took the poet three hours to make sense out of, could easily take the editor three steady days or longer.

Sometimes, a poet undermines his own best efforts. Olson softened the effectiveness of his "Grandfather-Father Poem" (*Archaeologist of Morning,* pp. [216]-[20]) because of carelessnesses. When he prepared a typescript for *Poetry* magazine from his original holograph manuscript, he typed only a single quotation mark at the beginning of the word "understand" in the following passage (p. [217], lines 29-31):

> my father would
> 'understand
> anyone

and when it came time for proofs, he excised the quotation mark while indicating his uncertainty in the margin: "or does mss. show a ' and a ' ?" (both typescript and proofs in the *Poetry* archive, Lilly Library, Indiana University). The marginal note indicates the poet did not have a copy of his typescript to read against, but the real confusion was originally his own doing, for his holograph manuscript not only has the opening quotation mark clearly, but also a closing one, which because of its location in the handwritten passage had been mistaken by Olson for a comma in the previous line. The result troubles the sense of the passage, by seemingly linking "my father" to the poem's previous lines concerning Olson's grandfather. His father then appears as object, grammatically, of the grandfather's hate:

loving man
who hated

my father, would
understand
anyone...

Whereas, the father is actually the subject of the more tender portrait that results when the comma is omitted and the quotation marks are properly restored:

my father would
'understand
anyone

These three lines may also stand in apposition to the previous lines, so that "loving man / who hated" pertains to the poet's father as much as to his grandfather—a portrait consistent with that in *The Post Office,* where his father's demoralization and bitterness that followed his being hounded by the bosses for his union activities is sketched.

Again, on p. [217] of *Archaeologist of Morning,* lines 35-38—

what also conceivabl[y] my
grandfather may
have been gave allegiances to
—like the Church I don't know...

—it is not the Catholic Church, in the shadow of which he was raised, that Olson does not know, but the fact or extent of his grandfather's "allegiances." He had originally written, after speaking about Irish "blockheads,"

> what also conceivably my
> grandfather may
> have been gave allegiances to
> —like the Church
> (possibly: I don't know...

—unless, in the final version, he has decided to stress his own disaffection. Finally, in line 12 of p. [218], he neglects to type his original manuscript's "wldn't" and achieves just the opposite meaning intended: "He would... give up / anything to / anyone"—an inexplicable softness in the fearsome "black" Jack Hines. It is a somewhat self-indulgent poem, nevertheless an earnest and interesting one in autobiographical terms, which should have a consistency of tone and attitude (formally, it has little else).

The fact is that occasionally—though, admittedly, only rarely—Olson could not read his own handwriting, such as when he mistook his usual abrupted *-ing* ending and wrote "one this" for "one thing" in the manuscript of "I'm going to hate to leave this Earthly Paradise" (*Maximus* 594). Fortunately, he caught the mistake in proofs. It does not always work out so happily. In the original holograph of the same poem, by following slavishly the confused line order cramped on the page, Olson lost track of the original path of writing, the literal syntax, and garbled a rather straightforward title of a painting by the Gloucester artist Fitz-Hugh Lane. What is worse (making the editor who comes after helpless, lacking sufficient authorization), he insisted upon the distorted order in the proofs, where it had been corrected by the printer, in the belief that he was obeying his originary text. Thus, Lane's "Moonlight on the Harbor at Low Water" becomes "Moonlight on the / At Low Water Harbor / Scene," a graceless rendering to no advantage. But what is carelessness to some is discovery to others, whether in play or relationships or the aesthetic moment. In that case, the editor can point out the complexity as he sees it, according to his own reasoning, even though he lacks the ultimate authority, in the face of the author's pointed insis-

tence, to make the necessary corrections.

Such strains and distortions are more allowable, perhaps at times even desirable, in the longer, open, "processual" poems of the postmoderns. They would be less tolerable in a tightly controlled sonnet or regularly progressing ode. Finally, it is a different attitude toward order that holds such poems in sway, than in a poetry where regularity of form and closely monitored, if not strictly metered, lines are given highest priority. Clearly, in Olson's case a change has taken place between the early *Maximus* poems and later ones such as these—on the level of what is tolerable alone. In the beginning of his epic, Olson is strict, ruthless ("limits / are what any of us / are inside of"); progressively, he grows riskier—but, it can be argued, allowably so. Not only does he reach for more—"the more terrestrial angel vision, baby!"[14]—but he has sufficiently gained the reader's trust with the deliberateness, intensity, and scope of the early poems. There is overall, retrospectively, a sense of fugue or plainsong, where the chant is set down, fixed, and the variations can then begin to be infinite. There is increasingly a different sense of time—not only much circling, like the gulls of the early poems or the cormorants of the later ones, or even the Ismailis as reported in Henry Corbin's "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism,"[15] an important source for the later Olson—but also soaring excursions. These flights are possible only because the poet has convinced us in those "fivers" such as "Some Good News," "Stiffening, in the Master Founders' Wills," and "Capt Christopher Levett (of York)" near the end of the first *Maximus* volume (as well as "The Gulf of Maine," *Maximus* 278-80), all written in five-line stanzas, that there is pattern control. The image Olson himself used in the last years was the fixed pole amid the phenomenal swirl, and even if that stands finally for himself, his personal ego, which ordinarily is "not very interesting, no / matter / who,"[16] it endures because the poet has *also* constructed a hero, an authority, a Maximus.

The editor's own authority is more limited. Where there are unusual difficulties or where the fate of a poem may hang by a reading of one line or word (more true for a poem, where each word counts like in no other form of literature), it may be possible to publish with the edition, or at least in a separate article dealing with the edition, photographs of the more difficult passages, so that intent readers can see for themselves just

where the impossibilities lie. Such a case might be "I have been an ability—a machine . . ." (*Maximus* 495-99), where the original holograph winds down into multiple swirlings and diminishing vortices.[17] With photographs, the reader can graphically view the necessity of the editorial decision to break off the poem (indicated by an ellipsis within square brackets), salvaging as much as possible. Often it is a case of reading "fisherman" for "fishermen" or "on" for "or." Such soft or bruised passages seem especially vulnerable to commentators, who are invariably drawn to them and alight, hoping to make what they consider some special discovery. Thus one critic calls attention to the line "its accent is its own mirage" in the 1968 printing of "Maximus, at the Harbor" (the line should have read "its ascent") as a "typical instance of the way in which Olson uses (and abuses) his sources." He acknowledges the original source of the line in Corbin's "Cyclical Time" essay, but goes on to suggest that Olson is arcanely punning, encouraged no doubt by the poet's actually doing so elsewhere in the same line—in which the Arabic *mi'raj,* "ascent," is "translated" into our "mirage."[18]

Example after example is fraught with decision-making necessities and, in certain cases, ambiguities that can only be declared, without exaggeration, to be eternal. In some instances where letters of a word are typed over one another with equal impression (a common enough practice, especially before "self-correcting" typewriters), there is no alternative for the editor but to put both. "Events are imaged as they happen," Olson wrote to Robert Creeley, 25 October 1950; or is it that "events are images"?[19] Olson typed both. In this particular case, Creeley made a typescript—preserved among his papers at the Lilly Library, Indiana University—of Olson's letter, reading the word as "imaged" (though both manuscript and context continue to allow room for doubt). Another one of the more perplexing ambiguities, though hardly a crucial one to the life of the poem, is the "trapped" vs. "tripped" alternative in the *Maximus* poem beginning, "They brawled in the streets, trapped the night watchman / with his own stick . . ." (*Maximus* 294). Was the night watchman actually "tripped" by his own club, as the poet's source, the seventeenth-century record, says he was,[20] or "trapped" by aggressive rowdies? The assembled manuscripts allow for both readings. The meaning is clear and unchanged in either case, so there is no loss no matter

what choice is made, although "trapped" by his own club is more imaginative than the more expected "tripped," and it is possible Olson thought so too and let it stand. In such cases, the editor decides to go along with the latest manuscript that can be said to carry the poet's authority, leaving the reader (through the editor's notes) to entertain any lingering alternatives—whether the watchman was tripped to the cobbles, or pinned up against the wall, or halted in his tracks by the threat of an upraised billy.

The question must eventually be raised, to what extent does an editor correct a text? The word Olson most abused, in terms of spelling, throughout his manuscripts, was—ironically, no doubt, for a poet—"rhythm." Spellings of "rythm," "rythym," "rhythym," "rhthym," even "rhymthm," have been observed. These should have been editorially corrected—either silently or, preferably, within brackets—or pointed to with a "*sic,*" in such a publication as Olson's *Letters for Origin.* Otherwise, the appearance may achieve unwarranted significance and lead a critic to make a case for the spelling as a kind of intentional pun. Indeed, the author of a study of *Maximus* confidently writes: "Olson's spelling of 'rhythym' (rhyt-him) is, of course, to underscore the personal, immediate sense of measure as the only useful understanding of time."[21] Whereas, in fact, the spelling is just a simple, repeated error that occurs throughout Olson's letters to Cid Corman (the instance cited), just as it does his letters to Creeley and elsewhere among his writings. In fact, an instance of it can be noted as early as typed notes from the 1930s among his papers. It is simply one of those irremediable, irredeemable, almost congenital errors that all of us have; the only word so consistently mangled by Olson. But the critic was justified in seizing upon it, having had every reason to expect the editor to deal with the unusual spelling and resolve it satisfactorily—as either an error or a meaningful misspelling. Otherwise, it is given more significance than it deserves and comes near to being one of the fabled "Freudian slips."

The silent correction of misspellings raises another interesting question. How is such a notion to be reconciled with some poets' insistence on the value of error, which was sometimes Pound's position as well as Olson's? One thing to consider is that acceptance of "parapraxis" or meaningful error is a later insistence with Olson, beginning around 1961

or 1962. From that point on, his revision chiefly takes the form of omitting a poem from the *Maximus* series rather than rewriting it or manipulating individual lines and words. Previously, evidence from earlier manuscripts indicates that his practice had been to consciously whittle a product. There are extensive revisions throughout his early manuscripts; in some cases, such as "The Kingfishers," "Projective Verse," and "Human Universe," as many as several drafts. His first important essays, "Lear and Moby-Dick" and "Dostoevsky and the Possessed," were repeatedly reworked (even though the former was initially written in a 72-hour sitting, assisted by two quarts of Vat 69 whiskey[22]), while "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," prepared in 1958 for the *Chicago Review,* was an agony to write, taking him several weeks. Later, whether due to a change of habit or of compositional theory, what is commonly known as craft is less a deliberate factor in his writings, specifically in regard to this matter of revision or self-improvement. This is as true for his correspondence as for poems and essays. Whereas in the 1930s and 1940s he drafted versions of letters, later, delighting in the spontaneity of performance, he dashed off responses or inquiries, correcting or refocusing himself as he went along, in the act of writing. Undoubtedly it was a matter of confidence and achieved "voice" as much as any pressure of time. But also, his outlook had changed: revision was superseded by vision.

An editor must be careful not to impose an order, a correctness, where there is none intended. David Porter reminds us—after surveying Emily Dickinson's manuscripts in the Robert Frost Library at Amherst, where one verse appears on back of instructions for operating a kerosene lamp, another is begun on the back of a cooking-chocolate wrapper—all the oddments of living—how the standard edition of her work, no matter how skillful and indispensable, may misrepresent the "essential" Dickinson. "It makes her seem orderly and deliberate. The even margins and spacing, the straight lines, each with a capital at the beginning, the stanzaic regularity, the visual craftsmanship, the *finality* and definiteness: all are misleading. It is just that definiteness that is missing from her work."[23] How true also for the later Olson, whose papers now in acid-free folders in Connecticut are no different—typing bond held together by straight pins, poems on backs of envelopes or envelopes torn apart to

get at the fresh space within, poems on menus and restaurant placemats, on a Bic pen wrapper, a deaf-mute alphabet card, a paycheck stub, his son's schoolwork—right down to the paper towels of his deathbed notes.[24] All evidence of the continuity of creation. Keep me from ever finishing anything, wrote Melville; the "finished" poem is only one of many conventions of art and mind.

Above all, the scholar-editor must eschew any of the imperialisms of scholarship, even more than the occasional pedantries of a publisher's "house style." The editor must not "correct" a poet's text by imposing a superior or "missionary" scholarship upon the native text, no matter how well intentioned, at least without some note of explanation. There is nothing more disturbing than to find the alteration of Pound's succinct and appealing "*harpes et luthes*"—which could be the basis of an entire poetics—to "*harpes et luz*" in the 1975 New Directions edition of *The Cantos,* apparently on the sole authority of scholar Eva Hesse's recommendation.[25] In point of fact, the phrase as it appears in Canto 45 is an allusion to Villon's "ballade pour prier Nostre Dame," some texts of which have "*luths,*" other "*leuz*" or "*luz,*" for "lutes." Pound's addition of the *e* simply makes the word parallel with "*harpes,*" at the same time giving it an "old" English air (matching the "hath" of a previous line). A poetry without a sustaining predictability of rhyme and meter may depend more on greater subtleties.

Continuing the survey of editorial responsibilities, one of the few developments the textual critic of recent writing has to be concerned with more so than ever before—both because of the oral nature of much postmodern poetry, but also due to the advances of technology—are tape recordings (and now, videotapes). There are a large number of recordings of the poets reading their own work, as well as of interviews, discussions, and lectures; almost every poet who came into prominence after 1950 is well represented. It might be one of the chief differences between postmodern textual criticism and earlier efforts—even qualitatively, by affecting our understanding of what constitutes a definitive text.

One of the more important questions regarding the use of recordings as copy texts (definitive texts) was raised by Olson's reading of poems during the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference. Does a poet's reading, where he obviously departs from the printed text to improvise or

interject, count? Olson stressed the poet's linguistic birthright: "You know, a poet, when he's alive, whether he talks or reads you his poems is [it's?] the same thing."[26] In this instance, he reads the line, "Any season, in this fresh time" from his "Ode on Nativity," as "in this fresh tune," pausing to interject, " 'time' is what I [originally] wrote."[27] Does the substitution of "tune," then constitute an authorized reading and, because it is later than all published manuscripts, become the copy text? Again, a little later Olson reads "the instant" for "the infant" and adds the rhyme "stalks" to accompany "when the divine tempter also walks." Are these spontaneities to be considered legitimate alternatives and included as such in a definitive edition? The noted Old English scholar, Jess B. Bessinger, raises the same question regarding a recording of "The Seafarer" that Pound made at Harvard in 1939, some twenty-seven years after its first publication. In his reading, Pound adds a few definite articles and omits modifiers in some lines, thereby "smoothing over the stern angularity of his poem," and Bessinger wonders whether this text might not have greater authority than earlier printed versions.[28] I would not think so, just on the basis that it is chronologically later, but it could have an equal authority and value, and could be published side by side (or at page bottom or in an appendix) in a variorum edition, for the same reasons Olson's improvisations might be taken note of. They can at least be included as variants, not necessarily as "improvements," but as indications of the liveliness of the poet's imagination and continued engagement with his own words.

More problematic by far is where the only known text of a poem is a recorded reading, where the piece is otherwise unpublished or where no known manuscript survives. In that case, at least the words of the text can be given, even though the line breaks and some of the punctuation may only be approximations (which the editor must identify as such) according to breath pauses, despite the fact that carefully monitored pauses on the recording are by themselves no guarantee the original written line divisions are being observed. Once again, the pattern of a poet's habits must serve as a guide. Comparison can be made between other recordings and available printed texts, in cases where such exist, to determine how faithful a poet ordinarily is to line breaks in reading out loud. Actually, it is a practice that varies considerably among poets, each

almost as unique as his or her voiceprint. In public performance, many use the printed, punctuated line as a loose score to be improvised upon rather than strictly followed. There is no fixed rule that the end of a line is to be observed by a breath pause. Some poets follow the natural, grammatical enjambments and syntactic traffic signs, others do not. Robert Creeley once discussed how, as a young poet, he was curious how William Carlos Williams read his poems aloud and especially how he dealt with terminal juncture, first listening to Williams on record, then asking him directly when they initially met. Williams's response was inconclusive—"sometimes I do, sometimes I don't"—although Creeley himself wound up being one of the more rigorous observers of line breaks.

And what of poems like Anne Waldman's "Fast Speaking Woman" and "Lady Tactics," where each performance necessarily, by announced design, involves improvisation, and where the chanting is as much a performance as a poem? Which, then, is the definitive text?

Occasionally, tapes are part of the process of poetic composition itself. Allen Ginsberg first spoke his "Wichita Vortex Sutra" into a portable tape recorder while traveling by Volkswagen bus across Kansas, later transcribing and revising it (and revising it further for *Planet News*). This is not quite a reversal of the traditional process, since print is still the result, but it is an example of the oral primacy.[29] In other cases, we begin with print and create a multiplicity of improvised alternative texts, any one of which might be considered definitive.

There are any number of realities the editor must face. As a reminder that poetry comes wrung from life, that most poetry is written in the traffic of daily reality, and that a manuscript may reflect this, there is John Wieners's powerful "Children of the Working Class," published first in the magazine *Athanor* and collected in his *Behind the State Capitol* (1975). The poem was sent to editor Douglas Calhoun shortly after it was written, on May Day, 1972, in response to a request for material. Among minor emendations in the original typescript, the name of a Massachusetts state hospital initially cited in the poem had been crossed out and "Staid" (a nicely ironic echo with "State") was substituted. A note that Calhoun made upon receiving the manuscript, however, reveals that the poet crossed out the hospital's name only because officials forced his hand. The poem was written while Wieners was committed for a stay in

the hospital after several incidents of bizarre conduct, and when he read the poem in group therapy, the doctors would not permit him to use the name of the hospital. Since he was using the institution's typewriter, he could not prepare the poem to send out without making the change. "Staid" was changed back to "Taunton" in time for the poem's magazine appearance, following a phone call from Wieners. As Calhoun later wrote: "[Wieners] called three or four times, odd hours. Picture him in some corner of the hospital, a deserted office, making calls, glancing over his shoulder, about poetry."[30]

The anecdote serves also as a reminder that changes can be made in a work by means other than the written. George Quasha, who first published Olson's "I'm going to hate to leave this Earthly Paradise," remembered the experience of the poet's "revising over long-distance phone, which amazed me and changed me forever—I could HEAR him thinking and hearing his poem, how he dealt with sound over many lines, the relationships . . ."[31] In such a case, the editor coming years later cannot wring the telephone wires for confirmation or clarification. But this simply means that absolute certainty is no more possible for an editor than for any other man of faith and enterprise.

More challenging is when a poet about-faces, like Auden, changing an identity or self-image.[32] Again Wieners, one of the most sensitive and supremely lyrical poets of the late 1950s-early 1960s, can continue to serve as example. He is a special case among the poets of the period, since his work more than that of any other has suffered from textual difficulties, often self-inflicted.[33] It raises one of the more interesting if delicate problems in editing: the responsibility of the editor, its natural limitations and its relation to the domain of authorial responsibility.

Striking differences are apparent between the texts in Wieners's later collections and their earliest appearances. There is *The Hotel Wentley Poems,* for example, a sequence written over eight days while staying in a San Francisco hotel room. The book was first published in 1958, and a number of the poems were successfully included in Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* anthology in 1960.[34] A second edition of the poems, printed in 1965, however, was identified on the title page as consisting of the "original versions." Most readers notice the restoration of the full title of "A poem for cocksuckers," but the more important differences

are within the body of the texts, and—my ultimate point may be—not always for the better. Throughout the poems, in the line arrangement and spacing, there is a certain rough genius smoothed out, reduced to regularity. A naivité, which is the charm of these poems (innocence within corruption is their special quality), is now covered up. The sense is of a later hand nervously touching up, tidying, overworking areas. What makes it harder for any editor is that Wieners himself preferred the "original" versions, even choosing those versions for his 1972 *Selected Poems.* Does *Selected Poems,* then, constitute the author's "authorized" text, the furthest development of his art—or a tragic misjudgment and even misrepresentation of his talent?

In some cases, both versions work equally well. For example, the final twenty-eight lines of the revised "Poem for the old man" have been cut away to achieve a different, but no less effective, ending. More often, however, the "original" versions have just the opposite effect than might have been expected. They read, in fact, like later, reworked versions. The differences seem to be, again, the alterations of an uncertain hand seeking to smooth out and improve. But in so doing, the poems are deprived of their later appropriate sharp edge, adding—as in the case of "A poem for record changers"—unnecessary verbiage, going from the crispness and compression of

> Details
> but which are here and
> I hear and shall never
> give up again...

back to

> All dull details
> I can only describe to you,
> but which are here and
> I hear...[35]

A certain defeat enters into the tone when "dull" and "only describe" are tolerated.

The greatest loss, in this writer's opinion, comes in one of Wieners's finest poems, "A poem for painters." A new—though again apparently

"original"—five-line section appears, with gratuitous football imagery:

> Let me ramble here.
> Yet stay within my own yardlines.
> I go out of bounds
> without defense,
> oh attack

("without defense / or attack" in the *Selected Poems* version). There are still more changes made in the poem for its 1972 appearance, again not for the better. In section 5, for example, instead of "is on the face: gone stale," we now have, "on the face's gone stale"—an awkward if not impossible use of "face's." Leave well enough alone! And instead of the subsequent section beginning with the matter-of-fact, unambiguous "Let us stay with what we know," it now begins: "At last the game is over / and the line lengthen"—not only delayed, but with a metaphoric non sequitur. The "line" in that passage may be taken as an extension of the football field's yard lines of the previous metaphor, perhaps, or even a sudden shift to a poetic "line." In either case, the pun, besides being too obvious, is not appropriate: the line does mimetically lengthen at that one point, but it goes back to hug the margin immediately thereafter. The return to the original contributes nothing.

Later in the poem, in the powerful final section, the great summing up is interfered with in the original version by a need to elaborate, an added explanatory note signalled by "yet": "yet by these lines / I betray what little given me. One needs no defense..." Actually, one need not say it outright; the poem itself, in its "revised" bold state, does that work for the poet: "My poems contain... Only the score of a man's / struggle to stay with / what is his own." That direct, that undeniable an assertion. But the greatest disappointment comes at the very end, rendering the final lines anticlimactic in the most conspicuous manner. Instead of concluding the poem on the powerful, awesome image of "twisted faces, / my hands claw out at / only to draw back from the / blood already running there," Wieners goes on to add the completely superfluous and sentimental, "Oh come back, whatever heart / you have left. It is my life / you save. The poem is done." But by then, the poem has melted away.

To keep on with these problems as raised by the texts of Wieners's poems, we return to "Children of the Working Class" as it appears in

Behind the State Capitol. What happens if in the editor's opinion an author loses judgment and, working at cross purposes with himself (or an earlier self), revised an already solid work? Worse, what to do if an author "ruins" his or her own work? How, if at all, to "save" the author from himself? Does an editor have to accept all changes in such a notorious manuscript?

For example, in the Wieners poem there is the line beginning, "There has never been a man yet . . . ," which clearly corrects the earlier appearance of the line in *Athanor,* which reads "There was never been a man yet." "Was" for "has" is presumably a slip and has been beneficially corrected. Now, in selecting the poem for an anthology, an editor might choose to include just that change from the later revised version, but in all other respects keep to the original version. The principle would seem to be that if a revision is the correction of a previous error (as "has . . . been" for "was . . . been" certainly was), the change is necessary and praiseworthy. But if it is a revision of *meaning* as such, then it had best be foregone. It is a very dangerous precedent for an editor to selectively emend, and on the whole the best policy is to adopt versions wholly. Otherwise, too much responsibility slips from the poet and into the hands of the critic. It should not be encouraged. Gains cannot be excerpted at will by the editor; it usurps the author's own role and prerogative. Where would it stop? How quickly before the author's intentions become overridden by the editor's, no matter how kindly, reasonable, well-intentioned? If both versions of a poem are equally interesting, both should be published. If one lacks sufficient strength to stand on its own, it should be withheld, at least until a full critical or variorum edition.

More damaging to the Wieners poem in its later state is its new line arrangement and eccentric typesetting. Lines are broken or suspended without any gain in rhythm. Even worse, words are now divided—broken, really—without any necessity or perceivable advantage, including two- and three-letter words:

> 1907, My Mother was born, I am witness t-
> o the exasperation of gallant human beings at g-
> od, priestly fathers and Her Highness, Holy Mother the Church
> persons who felt they were never given a chance, had n-
> o luck and were flayed at suffering.[16]

What suffer most, perhaps, are lines where the rhythm falls hollow (in the above passage, at least it can be argued that there is continuity in the forced enjambment). There is, for instance, the misplaced emphasis on the isolate "the" in the following passage that is not permitted in the earlier version:

> there are worse, whom you may never see, non-crucial around
> the
> spoke, these you do, seldom...

The pacing is all off, here and in the grand finale of the poem, where instead of delivering the ultimate line in one raised breath, after a single line-space pause to take breath, the revised conclusion is rushed, jumbled, lost in the newly realigned flow. Instead of the stately length of "yes, I am witness not to God's goodness, but his better or less scorn"—in the manner of Whitman—the lines are hastened forward in an undistinguished random flow:

> ...I am witness
> not to Whitman's vision, but instead the
> poorhouses, the mad city asylums and re-
> lief workliness. Yes, I am witness no to
> God's goodness, but his better or less scorn.

The line which has stood extended and exposed, neither defiant nor despairing—without self-pity, but bearing witness with a level keenness that cuts—is now simply folded into place. Any sense of a large stately score is abandoned to a newer nervousness or freneticism, a hapless, ineffectual tumble. It seems to be a textbook exercise in what happens to the measure of a poem if lines are rearranged randomly instead of by heartbeat or brain wave, breath-pause or inflection of meaning.

Postmodern poetics is a relativist poetics; it is relational rather than rational. Flexibility in syntax is one characteristic aspect. Unorthodox capitalization and punctuation are evident throughout Gary Snyder's work, to add another example. In Snyder's fine "To the Chinese Comrades," periods are used for only the strongest pauses, not according to an abstract grammatical consistency. The lower case makes for a chorus of voices, and indentation itself is another kind of meaningful punctuation:

Chairman Mao, you should quit smoking.
Dont bother those philosophers
Build dams, plant trees,
dont kill flies by hand.
Marx was another westerner.
it's all in the head.
You don't need the bomb.
stick to farming.
Write some poems. Swim the river.
those blue overalls are great.
Dont shoot me, let's go drinking.
just
Wait.[37]

Such a procedure is only momentarily inconsistent, hardly confusing. But in Wieners's case, the new changes alienate the rhythm; the poet's authentic voice, his valuable lyricism, is interfered with. In almost every alteration, his initial impulse is the purest one, and further modifications only muddle the lyrical streams. Again, in "Wrapped Up in an Indian Blanket," Willa Cather's "rat eaten rain ruined" book, "found in a Stone House / on a mountain in California," becomes, dully and almost carelessly: "W. Cather's book / from The Stone House / on Big Sur in / California."[38] The reader, or the editor in service of the reader, must often turn back to the rejected versions for the true sense of Wieners's accomplishment.

It might be affirmed that the formally grotesque has its uses—anger, defiance, "*déréglement*" of the reader's senses—but only if used properly, purposely, not yielded to utterly. Lines 7 and 8 of the original typescript of "Children of the Working Class" read: "blanched women, swollen and crudely numb / up before the dark of dawn"—a piece of straightforward naturalism. The same lines have been altered in *Behind the State Capitol* to "blanched women, swollen and crudely numb / ered before the dark of dawn," which is a gain, actually, in syncopation and depth of meaning. The transformation of "numb" into "numbered" creates rhythmic diversity and some surprise, while sacrificing nothing of the previous descriptive sense: the women are both numb and now also numbered. The poet invokes a hospital ward's roll-call or body-count, the institutional dehumanizing of patients (or clients, as they are now

euphemistically called, depriving them even of the "patience" that characterizes the foredoomed). It is a fine touch in the poem. However, in regard to such changes—in something as integral as a poem, at least—the editor cannot pick and choose among versions, shopping for acceptable revisions. The poems we are dealing with are discrete entities, organisms, not machines of interchangeable parts. The editor is without authority to perform "social work," to "improve" the poet, in cases where the author is treated as client or victim of his or her own humanness. We decry the presumption of the editor in submitting the case of something so individualistic as a poem to an abstract common good or "house style." The value is in the effective uniqueness of the language, or not at all. No textual critic has ever saved an author from oblivion.

Every editor's project has its epic (at least in the editor's eyes) examples of error and paradox, but they are really most infinite only in their variety. As might have been foretold, it is the larger principles that count—care, wariness, consistency, persistence—which are at times a counterpoint to the freedom of the artist. In the end it is pragma rather than dogma that counts. The editor of postmodern texts like that of any other texts, whether of law, scripture, or Euripides, must bear down with common, tenacious sense, allow imaginative possibilities, and practice empathetic reasoning—as if there wasn't any other way to proceed.

Notes:

1. Edited by the present writer and published by the University of California Press in 1983. Page references used here, e.g. *Maximus* 89, are to that edition. See also my *Editing The Maximus Poems* (Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut Library, 1983), which discusses the editing of volume three from among Olson's papers at the University of Connecticut Library.

2. "A Collation of Two Texts of *The Cantos*," *The Pound Newsletter*, no. 6 (April 1955), pp. 5-13, and Barbara C. Eastman, *Ezra Pound's Cantos: The Story of the Text 1948-1975* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1979), p. 75.

3. See *OLSON: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, no. 4 (Fall 1975), p. 113. The bibliographers were not alone in being taken in. John Wieners wrote Olson, 9 March 1957 (letter in Literary Archives, University of Connecticut Library): "Were you the one who did Queen Street Burle-Q in that COMBUST—? I can't tell from the layout, but don't answer you rat you did."

4. See *Fubbalo,* no. 1 (Summer 1964), p. [ii]. Olson's original manuscript is at the Spencer Library, University of Kansas.

5. Even in the case of editing the California *Maximus,* in seeking to correct an error on one page (an "of" for an "or" in Maximus 151, l. 6), a new one (another "of" for an "or") was actually introduced two lines earlier—apparently in the confusion of confirming changes by telephone—although the error would make perfect sense to a reader and its existence would only be known by the collator of texts (see *Editing The Maximus Poems,* p. 14). There is no doubt error has a life of its own, and survives in the universe as a kind of Andromeda strain (after Michael Crichton's novel).

6. Editor's Afterword, *The Maximus Poems,* p. 638.

7. An authoritative text may turn up anywhere. A copy of Ed Sanders's *Poem From Jail* published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books in 1963, bearing an inscription to a New York book dealer, 16 September 1964, and acquired by the University of Connecticut Library, contains two corrections potentially not available elsewhere. On p. 4, in the passage

> And Lady
> .....
> too old now
> to fuck for the
> China Lobby,

Sanders has crossed out "Lady" and substituted "Madame / Chaing [*sic*] Kai Chek," noting that "Ferlinghetti was afraid the 'China Lobby' wd sue his ass off." Later in the same copy, on p. 12, he has added "that" to line 15 to make, "Let that I leave behind..."

This discovery, if nothing else, sends the editor back to the author's original manuscripts, which fortunately, in this case, are preserved among the poet's papers (also at the University of Connecticut Library—though not the original holograph, which had been written in jail on toilet paper and smuggled out in Sanders's shoe). There among the papers, it can be found that Ferlinghetti wrote Sanders on first reading the poem, "you'll get sued, his soldiers will come for you," and later, 11 April 1962, after accepting the work for publication, that the passage "is so libelous that I might really be sued for lockstock&barrel, literally. Could you give her a pseudonym like: Madame Fuk U?... I want to leave the word fuck, and this would be the best way around it." The substitute dotted line was the final solution, even though Sanders had added in the margin of a fresh typescript prepared for the printer, hoping to forestall the problem, "source for this information is Field Marshall Montgomery's Memoirs."

8. Manuscript at Simon Fraser University Library.

9. See *Editing the Maximus Poems,* p. xvii n.2.

10. See my *Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 255-56. In the poem beginning "Dogtown the dog town..." (*Maximus* 188), Olson again refers to "the mother city... METRO- / POLIS"—another argument for a hyphen over a dash.

11. W.W. Greg's distinction between meaningful verbal changes and less significant variants such as spelling and punctuation, in his "The Rationale of Copy-Text," a classic text of textual criticism, included in the excellent anthology, *Art and Error: Modern Textual Editing,* eds. Ronald Gottesman and Scott Bennett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 17-36. Ordinarily, Greg's distinctions have little relevance to a poetry

where each comma or dash can change or create a meaning.

12. What also might legitimize Olson's substitution of Penelope for Persephone—despite the fact that poppies are associated with Hell (and Demeter) and the King *annually* awaits *Penelope's* return, not vice verse—is that Olson cites "the King of the Earth," not of Hell or the Underworld, which by a broad interpretation could be Odysseus.

13. See also *A Guide to the Maximus Poems,* pp. l-li.

14. Olson's phrase from his "Reading at Berkeley," in *Muthologos: The Collected Lectures & Interviews,* ed. George F. Butterick (Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1978), I, 112.

15. In *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks,* ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Pantheon, 1957), pp. 115-72.

16. Olson's conclusion to "Against Wisdom As Such," in *Human Universe and Other Essays,* ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 71.

17. See *Editing The Maximus Poems,* Appendix 1, pp. 2-13.

18. See *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* (London: Cape Goliard, 1968), p. [71]; Corbin, "Cyclical Time," p. 167; and Don Byrd, *Charles Olson's* Maximus (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1980, pp. 137-38. The line appears correctly in the poem's first publication in *12 Poets & 1 Painter,* ed. Donald M. Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1964), p. 30.

Another critic calls attention to the typographical errors in both *The Distances* and *Archaeologist of Morning* printings of "Anecdotes of the Late War," saying "Olson's deliberate 'illiteracy' almost obviates complaints such as these, for in most cases a partisan apologist could easily construct a protective rationale for even the most blatant typographical or grammatical offense," and more rightly points out that "instances like these breed suspicion that perhaps more than a few projective flights of genius might have really been mere typographical blunders. The methodology of this poem is idiosyncratically difficult as it is without interpretive red herrings such as these" (Thomas F. Merrill, *The Poetry of Charles Olson: A Primer,* Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1982, p. 115). Yet the critic himself not only fails to check the poem against the original 1955 published text, but mistakes as an error the passage, "the elevator / goink down"—a clear bit of dialectal color!

19. See *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence,* ed. George F. Butterick (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1981), III, 135.

20. See *A Guide to the Maximus Poems,* pp. 410-11.

21. Byrd, *Charles Olson's* Maximus, p. 33.

22. *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley,* III, 132.

23. "Emily Dickinson, The First Modern," *New Boston Review,* 6 (Jan.-Feb. 1981), p. 17. See also Porter's *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 2-3.

24. "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum," OLSON, no. 3 (Spring 1975), pp. 64-92.

25. Eastman, *Ezra Pound's Cantos,* p. 75. It is unlikely that Pound is punning on Spanish "light," despite the predominance of that subject throughout the poems.

26. *Muthologos,* I, 111. Olson continues: "And when [a poet] is made of three parts—his life, his mouth, and his poem—then, by god, the earth belongs to us!" See also Michael Davidson's admirable discussion of the role of tapes, " 'By ear, he sd': Audio-Tapes and Contemporary Criticism," *Credences,* n.s. 1 (1981), pp. 105-20.

27. *Muthologos,* I, 105. See also Olson's reading of "Letter 10" and "On First Looking Out of Juan De La Cosa's Eyes," *Muthologos,* I, 137 ff.

28. "The Oral Text of Ezra Pound's 'The Seafarer,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 47 (April 1961), pp. 173-77. Hugh Kenner reminds us of another form of the difficulty in relation to Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium"—while offering other practical wisdom—in his "Reflections on the Status of the Text," *Cumberland Poetry Review,* 1 (Winter 1981), p. 66.

29. See Ginsberg, "Improvised Poetics," in *Composed on the Tongue,* ed. Donald Allen (Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox, 1980), pp. 26 ff. Ginsberg also states on p. 31 there: "That written form is different from tape-poems when transcribed on the page. Though it's written down from the tape recorder, the tape process got me *talking* more..." A comparison of the "Wichita Vortex Sutra" tapes and the poet's successive manuscript transcriptions would undoubtedly be one of the most rewarding possible explorations of the entire relation between oral poetry and poetry written directly for the page.

Even as this essay was being prepared, Wang Laboratories of Lowell, Mass., a maker of computers and word processing equipment, announced a machine able to automatically type spoken English. The dictation (or poem) is spoken into a phone and the "editing" is done on a computer terminal screen, which represents every few seconds of speech digitally, by a blip; the dictation can then be transmitted directly and electronically to a terminal for typing. The implications for poetic composition and consequent textual criticism are, in the words of Olson's "*Later Note on Letter # 15*" (*Maximus* 249), "yet to be found out."

30. Letter to the author, 28 September 1979. Wieners's original typescript and Calhoun's contemporary note concerning the phone calls are now in the Poetry Collection, State University of New York at Buffalo Libraries.

31. Letter to the author, 4 July 1980.

32. In poems like "In Time of War" and "September 1, 1939." See especially Joseph Warren Beach, *The Making of the Auden Canon* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), which deals at length with some of the problems raised in what follows.

33. See also my article on Wieners in *Contemporary Poets,* ed. James Vinson, 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1980), pp. 1652-54.

34. There was also a second printing of *The Hotel Wentley Poems* in early 1959, with "I had love" (line 24 of "A poem for painters") corrected to "I held love," along with "other minor resettings" (*A Bibliography of the Auerhahn Press,* Berkeley: Poltroon Press, 1976, p. 71). It was this corrected text that appeared in *The New American Poetry,* ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 365-69.

35. The same passage is revised again in *Selected Poems* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 21, to:

> All dull details
> I only describe
> but which are here
> I hear and shall never
> give up again

—a change made as early as 1967, when the volume had been typeset but not released by the publisher, in part because of just such uncertainties (author's uncorrected galleys in Literary Archives, University of Connecticut Library).

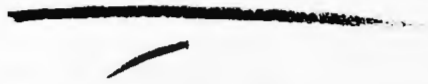
36. Wieners's entire volume shows evidence of such eccentric typesetting (erratic spacing and capitalization, unpredictable punctuation, as if the machine had galloped away from its rider)—to such an extent it must be accepted as the "style" of the book, with its gold lamé covers lettered in silver and autobiographical photo-collages plus "abbreviated prose insights" throughout. There is something of the defiantly "punk" mixed with a desire for glamor in Wieners's last work that goes beyond "camp," and whether it is a personal idiosyncrasy or a new cultural style, anticipating (in 1975) the emerging "New Wave" fashion of the later 1970s, it is not safely possible to say. In any case, the book's design precisely mirrors the compositional technique of the individual poems and especially their diction, which is laboriously formal, malaproprian yet sentimental, simultaneously haggard and delicate.

In a review of *Behind the State Capitol,* Charley Shively, a friend of the poet and part of the collective that published the volume, suggests the erratic spelling and punctuation are intended. See "What Happened to the Mind of John Wieners?" *Gay Sunshine,* nos. 26-27 (Winter 1975-76), pp. 32-33. The form of the published poems is not intentional in all regards, however. A comparison of the Good Gay Poets text with the photocopy of Wieners's original typescript used for the edition (now in the Literay Archives, University of Connecticut Library) reveals significant differences of spacing within lines. For example, the changes in lines 39-43 (quoted here) and continuing to the end of the poem, are all Wieners's own decisions; however, some of the other lineation is simply the result of the willingness of the book's designer and publisher to allow carry-over lines (those too long to fit within the established margins of the volume) to be set flush left, without any indentation or other indication (such as open square brackets) that they were part of the original long line preceding. This is most noticeable in lines 8-9, 16-17 (which I single out for criticism below), 20-21, 22-23, and the final two lines (where the difference is inconsequential)—thus, all adding to the sense of crippled rhythm. Whereas, obvious typographical errors, such as the transposition in line 15, "Inidanheads," were allowed to remain. The result is a detrimental production, no favor to the integrity of the author's text.

Within limits, many of these "problems" as described might be considered characteristic of the postmodern impulse: a projection of the form from within. Nor are such minute word divisions and shavings *always* detrimental. One need only see, for example, the work of Susan Howe, although she has clearly established the "all-over" as her form from the start of her poems. For Wieners in the "mainstream" of the postmodern and its complexities, see also Douglas Messerli, "John Wieners and a 'Post-Modernist' Quandary," *Sun & Moon,* no. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 86-104.

37. *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 102.

38. The first version is in *Ace of Pentacles* (New York: Carr & Wilson, 1964), p. 19; the second, now stifled in three-line stanzas, is in *Selected Poems,* p. 46.



FROM

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF CHARLES OLSON:

1940-49

Edited by George Butterick

The following poems will be included in *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson,* to be published by the University of California Press. None have ever been published before. They have been selected from among the poet's papers at the University of Connecticut Library. In *Sulfur* #12 we will present a second selection from the years 1950-57, and in *Sulfur* #13, a third selection from 1958-64.

WHITE HORSE

White horse he was, to her black foal.
Behold! they were desire
They wooed, against a world in shoal
feared their fire.

He grew more human,
less woman she,
image approached
animality.

With grace he asked
return to world;
reply and hate,
to a tree she curled.

MARRY THE MARROW

Marrow unvisited,
And then, visited,
The bones gone and the needed waters' return:
A tight relax as of the sea
Against the land
In flood.

Structure! least steel, most liquid:
The Annisquam and the Atlantic
At high fulfilled the land,
Brimmed and eased it.

Stretched fabric across the hips of the earth,
French cut,
Discovering the global curve beneath.

(Death is the untensed, the rigid,
What the worms enjoy,
Wood,
Naught.)

("There's tricks i' th' world,"
And disaster,
And so with love.)

But there's instancy.
And to lie in wait for it,
And to seize it,
It is to justify the stars.

Annul the Milky Way we do.
But then, quick as star's fall,
Your Cassiopeia and Charles' Wain do burn.

There's structure in the heavens.
Sickness is, to let the clouds decide.
Sometimes we make the sky.

Shall we string and tense the marrow more?

FABLE FOR SLUMBER

An animal dwelt
In the body of a child.
Animal and child,
The man was wild.

The child asked all,
His appetite huge.
The world so small
Gave subterfuge.

Who failed the child
The animal struck.
In a world too mild
The man was amok.

His hate a tooth,
His word a claw,
His anger truth
His ego law.

The child of love
Made man of hate,
The frustrate child
The animal ate.

THE HOUSE

The land outside, and the night is the enemy's.

I watched their night descend and cause our eyes to scatter like small animals. I saw the invaded land separate, break up to islands in a flood then to be surrounded easily by their arms.

I am in this house with many people whom I love though none I intimately know. I pass from room to room offering a solace they, not I sitting among them, need. They are aware as I there is night and no land beyond the circle of light this kerosene lamp sweetens.

Nor they nor I speak for their eyes are quiet, do not scatter.

Inside this house we sit and no longer does it seem to matter that, without, there is no man between the black of water and of night.

MINDANAO

Where you are deep
I am
in seed's leap
found

Naked diver
dove

in blue
and found no pearl
but you!

Returned to day
my eyes stay
dark
and see
that verity!

RAPHAEL

Last night I heard
Raphael had
A concept of negation.
But when did concept
Ever lead to creation?
When God conceived
Was He deceived
And took it for negation?
When Adam delved and Eve span
And made us all a nation
Was that
—negation?

THE NIGHT

I waked, and sat out the watch, the night.
With a full moon the land was bright.

> I had disliked them both, flight doctor, engineer
> the latter a pulp crammed with 'sir'
> and Medical Dick, theatric, stuffed with career
> dead men in his mouth, and a sex leer

At three the baby cried in the house next door.
The white dog fed her pups at four.

> I disposed of their argument: cold or dry run
> with the warhead in, the QED
> is a hit, and death

In the neighborhood at six there was an unheard stir.
Men's feet scratched the street in half an hour.

> I remembered an accident on a city street:
> the human body broken is a doll of flesh.
> They said it was a hand at the water's break
> disclosed the pilot in the mangrove mesh.

Motors roar in the predawn dark.
Cannon at seven sound the end of sleep.

> In the morning she said my skin was soft
> my eyes brown, and round like a boy's
> my flesh pink: it was the night.

SHE

You are to me, love, half family half tree
You go in two directions, double my joy
Swift away and sure at home, Atalanta and Penelope

Less the latter than her quality
Men have not made the image of:
A permanence, a skill we only value now
That women, as a rule, not only cannot cook, my love
But cannot—rhyme—as well!

It is not chastity and tricks
But taste and wonder, knacks
Of trees and wind, hills and their covering
Contour of earth and undersurge of sea

You are to me, love, these, a simile
To run around my metaphor
And laugh, and jibe with glee
The bulk of my magnificence
The consequence of me!

SHE, THUS:

The bottom of the air is disturbed
as with an undertow
Breathing is difficult,
and though the winds blow
Heaviness is upon me.

His strictures tighten, bind my wonder
Cramp the questions of my flesh.
And the thunder of his voice!
Huddle-muddle in my ear.

I cannot recapture the play I need,
the run and nonny of a sun and sea.
I am too quick for his slow pace.
The flight of my blood, Atalanta race
Guys his deliberate course.

He drops gold apples. I stop, admire.
Something he fails to do hurts like wire.

Intent, a bird, I ask if this be love.
Turtle-wise, he knows, appetite on move.

I work and, inside, prick myself, a needle.
I waste, and call myself a weed, a nettle.
Yet know I am as lovely as a flower,
as subtle as the image in the pool,
a queen of love, fashioned for misrule.

In the meadow where he wooed me on that rock I caught.

I look back and there, apt, he comes.
I lose my step: where are the other ones?
He does not seem to run the faster
And yet, I do not know, he is the master.

O make the wind blow sweeter
O make the air be light
For I would have my breath again
And be your love tonight!

BIRTH'S OBITUARY

Plane's flight your helix, transcontinental blood
Of Indian girl, fledged by the modern,
New Archeopteryx, you Hart Crane
Flew where others falter.

I remember your death, and reject all answers.
Noon, high time, at Orizaba stern you stood.
In ecstasy of wake you who made a bridge leaped!
Span made act, your death another Myth propelled.

Space, our shroud and swaddle, makes each a navigator.
Cathay lies where we must go, and if you end
In channel as another did in chains,
Oh Hart, wave-right you are!

You drank the poison as Crockett the cloud,
Tall man's thirst. After slake of sea,
Gyre on your tongue the tempest of the moon
Loud in your throad the wings of the sun.

A TRANSLATION

from Havelock Ellis

This was her dream:

I had gone to bed worried with the troubles of the day,
and full of fierce revolt against society.
I tried to soothe myself with thoughts of him, away.

I do not know at what hour of the night
I seemed to find myself, quite sudden, naked
in a sweet place round with sun
and full of joy to walk alone thus bathed in light.

And as I walked my skin grew firm, my breasts regained
Their beauty and their youth. With one thing only was I stained:
on my body the wrinkles of childbirth still remained.
Which my hands from instinct tried to hide
While my heart so gently to me cried:

"They are the wounds of the war to which women go;
he cannot but love you so."

Then I knew.
And knew that I could tell him:
there is this corner in the world
where we may walk quite naked without shame.

Thus did she dream.

HER DREAM, HALF REMEMBERED

A Translation from Havelock Ellis

There, quick, a crowd was on me. Jugglers, giants,
Sullen hunchbacks, tumbling dwarfs. Acrobats whirled,
And I was full of fear of the returning world.

But there was one, a man, small, erect, all bronze
His copper skin patina to my eye
Who watched me dance, with half descent and bound

From holly tree to sunwhite shadowed ground.

He held the flute he played with serpent arms,
And kissed me as I floated down with knees apart
Cubed and motleyed like some clown, astart.

KEY WEST

"Just the kind of a guy who
used to play the piano
in the whore houses
when I was a kid,"

was what Sully said.
He had me pegged.

"You'd think, from the size of him,
he'd be a stevedor," was Canby's idea.
"But he don't know any more about low poker
than a hog does about the Bible!"

At first they figured I was F.B.I.
Ditto three sailors at the Cuban place
where I went for bollos and fried salami.
"Listen, jerk, nobody don't work
in a dump like this in war."
"If he don't, he must be queer"

or

—an FBI piano player

in a whore house

THE WINTER AFTER

Bitter winter

Rain
Rain down, all moving things
Blind, with care as under-
ground go by each
Turned in
claws across the day
curled in their dark intent
go where?
will rain
does the sun
will rain put out
does the sun know
will rain put out the fire,
the bitter fire?

Winter wind
City wind
enters the bones
as fear comes

blows down as men move
weak
the next corner colder than the bones are cold

Cold, when the fire comes
the wind will make
will the wind
the fire higher
will the wind be left
or the heat be too much for the wind and the rain?

Wet snow
the wet street slow to let it gather
as men the death ahead
it falls as night exists
inhabiting itself
falls, whitens roof, pavement, ground
and if men stir

or do the ashes also burn
when men ignite the nitrogen of air?

THE DRAGON-FLY

Noon. The tall trees uphold the sky
The wind makes a sea of the ripening rye.
But the sun is the element of the dragon-fly:

The oats are green, green is the rye
The great green is the dragon-fly

A round moon makes of the night a stage
Sets down spaced black trees as properties
Peoples the lawn with swans and arabesques:

But the black of the wing of the dragon-fly
Plants the night in the middle of the rye.

A FISH IS THE FLOWER OF WATER

You who follow Henry Thoreau
beware

Forbear to drive life into a corner
and think to trap her
She will slip away like any girl

Men curiously without appetite
want wild muskrat meat

IGOR STRAVINSKY

An Homage

On the edge of woods
(as we are)
the advance, retreat of both
man as nature, nature as more than man
the sounds
tempi
fable
struggle-borne

On the edge of man
a horn a hooded step
by two white ropes an Echo led
to this levitican point

On the edge
tympanum and unicorn
telluric cube
he the balance—
And the scale the hounds
man, and the maiden both, torn

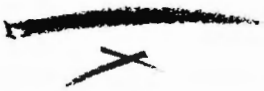
On the edge of woods
rock water
(peacocks in the sun)
a cello rubs itself against a tree.

DURA

To come to the look in the sacrificer's eyes

the archaic sought, the harshness
unsought

And the eyes which should burst
do not.



NOTES, CORRESPONDENCE, REVIEWS.

Pound After Torrey & Other Futures

Michael Palmer's reasonable review of E. Fuller Torrey's *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths* in *Sulfur 10* appears to be the only cool-headed response to that wasps' nest lobbed onto the assembly-line of the Pound industry. Elsewhere, tempers are hot. A leading disciple has told me he'd like to strangle Torrey; *Paideuma* (the "Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship") has asked readers to compile lists of inaccuracies in the book, and the magazine has started off what looks to be a long campaign with a nasty article in its latest issue titled "On E. Fuller Torrey, the Baiting of Dead Giants."

Such a response—particularly now that excerpts from the book have been mass-circulated in *Esquire* and *Psychology Today*—is predict-

able enough. And *The Roots of Treason* is, there's no question, an unrelievedly sleazy book on the sleazy side of Pound. Torrey, who's a shrink at St. Elizabeths, cannot write, knows nothing about poetry, doesn't think much of Pound as a poet, and is largely unable to evaluate the information he has assembled. The book revels in all of the bad news without considering any of the news that will stay news; and it is full of mistakes.

Nevertheless... I find it, in its way, the most important book on Pound since Kenner's *The Pound Era.* Torrey, clumsy as he is, has turned the rock over. We've always known what was there, but from now on it will be difficult for those of us who love Pound to keep gazing at the stars and still ignore the strange creatures running over our feet.

There have tended to be two camps, and only two camps. The Pound-haters dismissed the poetry by referring to the politics and to the bigotry. The Pound-lovers steadfastly read the literary works, keeping their eyes on the palaces in smoky light and the great ball of crystal, never glancing at what had fertilized such growth. In the thousands of elegant and erudite pages of *Paideuma,* for example, I can remember only one article which dealt, rather mildly, with Pound's fear and hatred of Jews. His relationship to types like John Kasper (who, in the 1950's, was throwing bombs at integrating elementary schools) is never mentioned.

[Worse, *Paideuma* appears to welcome those who are, uh, not unhappy with Pound's politics. The attack on Torrey by William French in the latest issue contains this bon mot on the title *The Roots of Treason*: "I thought for a moment it might be about Jane Fonda and the Viet Cong, but that was silly of me." Tart! Another *Paideuma* regular, Reno Odlin, will suddenly stop a scholarly note dead in its tracks to defend the honor of Franco or Pétain. *Paideuma,* despite the presence of its liberal co-editor, Burton Hatlin, seems reluctant to red-pencil such extraneous matter.]

The official line has remained unchanged since the Bollingen Prize controversy. Pound was not an anti-Semite: he was using Jews as medieval symbols of usura, he was only attacking certain rich Jews—and didn't he promote Zukofsky? Pound was not a Fascist: he (unfortunately) admired Mussolini, the drainer of swamps and enforcer of RR timetables. As for the broadcasts: he did not commit treason, but was merely airing economic views which he (right or wrong) thought would save America. Besides he was crazy—that is, too crazy to be tried for treason, but otherwise not crazy.

Thanks to the hard information in Fuller Torrey's book—the excerpts from unpublished material, not Torrey's comments on it—and the publication a few years ago of the transcripts of the radio broadcasts (*Ezra Pound Speaking*) the history of Pound, and the so-called Pound era, will surely have to be rewritten. What I hope is that it will be written by the Pound lovers, not the haters—that the lovers will finally accept both the heaven and hell of the man's mind and work. Rather than jump on the obvious flaws in Torrey's scholarship—as though he matters—we should start thinking about the evidence he presents.

Pound was a lifelong Jew-hater, not the "suburban anti-Semite" he confessed to Allen Ginsberg, but an obsessive, paranoid hater of Jews. Had his cultural nexus been Northern Europe rather than the Mediterranean, had he not toed the Greco-Roman-cradle-of-civilization line so literally, he would have been an enthusiastic Nazi. (During the war he signed at least some letters with swastikas and "Heil Hitler!"; in the broadcasts he recommended *Mein Kampf*.) His hatred of blacks extended to—when he was in St. Elizabeths in the 1950's—support for the White Citizens Council (for whom he wrote pamphlets), the Ku Klux Klan, and other such groups. There's no question that John Kasper was Pound's hit man as he instigated race riots through the South. [Let's see *Paideuma* publish the Pound-Kasper correspondence!]

Whether or not Pound actually committed treason is a circular question and, finally, not terribly interesting. [Concern over treason requires both a nationalistic ardor and enough doubt in one's country to believe that an individual outside the power structure could seriously effect its downfall.] Nevertheless, Pound undoubtedly favored the enemy in time of war: he wanted a Fascist Europe, if not a Fascist U.S. Treason, however, implies effective actions in support of the enemy. To my mind, his broadcasts were not treasonous simply because they were useless. One has to be familiar with the entire Pound pantheon, from Confucius to the Malatestas, to begin to follow them. Even then the speeches are often incomprehensible. Whom could they have influenced? Perhaps a young Hugh Kenner, tuning in late at night on his (probably homemade) short-wave, but not many others. Pound was indeed crying "Fire!" in a crowded theater, but he was crying "Fire!" in Bulgarian.

In that, he was probably crazy: the belief that one is relaying information when nobody knows what you're talking about. And there is a case to be made that Fascism and racism are themselves insane—if one assumes that political and social evil is a form of insanity. But there is no

doubt—why do the Poundians try to deny it?—that he was not *legally* insane. Legal insanity means 1) not in one's senses when one committed a crime; or 2) unable to understand the proceedings of one's own trial. The first is inapplicable to Pound; and so is the second. [The latter a piece of law that is really quite touching: How much of one's other trials does one understand?] There's plenty of evidence, and no contrary evidence, that Pound throughout the St. Elizabeths years was completely aware of everything going on about him. That his responses could be unusual is beside the point.

Further—and again, why do the Poundians deny it still?—there's no question that Dr. Overholser, the head of the hospital, kept the law at bay by issuing misleading reports on Pound's condition. If he hadn't Pound probably would have been executed. Overholser—and this is Torrey's major complaint, as it's the one that interests him professionally—took justice into his own hands. Thus the "secret" of St. Elizabeths: Overholser's wise and criminal acts. I imagine few of us share Torrey's indignation that a member of the psychiatric profession kept the government from murdering the country's best poet.

Torrey tends to characterize the St. Elizabeths years as funky party time—a long stretch from the evidence. But interestingly even the orthodox are coming around to a new reading of Pound's "incarceration." It may well be that it was the happiest time of Pound's life, or at least of the later life. He was without financial worries; he had full and uninterrupted time to write, a steady stream of people to talk to—after the isolation of wartime Rapallo—and a few young lovers. Carroll Terrell even believes that if well-meaning friends hadn't sprung Pound he would have finished the *Cantos.* Instead, he was thrown back to his particularly messy life. And it was then, after he had left the hospital, that he broke down and fell into silence.

Torrey's polemic, most of all, serves to underscore how, elsewhere, the books are being cooked on almost all the American moderns. For example, throughout Paul Mariani's biography of William Carlos Williams there are quotations from Doctor Bill on Jews: "lewd Jew's eyes," "horrible overfed Jewish types," "some fucking bastard of a yid," "some smart kike" (lawyer, that is, who might try to sue him for libel). A Williams short story begins: "He was one of those fresh Jewish types you want to kill at sight, the presuming poor whose looks change the minute cash is mentioned." His 1939 essay "Against the Weather" even asserts that Judaism is a "tribal-religious cult" that is "precisely the

equivalent" of Fascism. Yet Mariani, in the one paragraph of his 900-page book that discusses Williams' racism and anti-Semitism, brushes it off: WCW was "a product of his times" who did not "always escape the popular racial myths of his time." Torrey, whatever conclusions one wants to draw, at least gives us a clearer idea of what the modernists were talking about—and how they were talking:

> Pound, letter to Williams, 1936: "jews having been circumcised for centuries/ it must have had some effect on the character. [...] history is written and character is made by whether and HOW the male foreskin produces an effect of glorious sunrise or of annoyance in slippin backward. Someone diagnosed Shaw years ago by saying he had a tight foreskin/ the whole of puritan idiocy is produced by badly built foreskins. Criminology/ penology shd/ be written around the cock. The dissecting room shd/ lay off that chaotic bucket of sweet breads from the skull and start research from the prong UPward. The lay of the nerves/ etc. This doesn't blot out endocrinology/ but it is the fount of aesthetics/ means microscopic attention/ dissection and micro/ photographic enlargements/ killers etc/ shd have their prongs photoed postmortem."
>
> Williams' reply: "... if cutting off the loose hide over a few thousand years has altered the Hebrew character—I doubt it. By all the laws of heredity it should have affected the women and they are as bad as the men today, or worse. It ain't the skin that makes the difference in the man, its the stick in it that does it."

[Torrey, though unfortunately a Freudian and a prude, is also the first to document Pound's phallocentrism and to take seriously the wackier (wankier) aspects of the de Gourmont connection—such as Pound's quite literal interpretation of the creativity-ejaculation formula.]

As one rummages through the now-limitless documentation of American poetry, it seems that something surprising and unpleasant is always turning up. Take a tiny example, something I came across the other day: I had known of David Rafael Wang as a Chinese-American poet and a friend of Pound, who collaborated with Williams on the translation of some forty Chinese poems in the 1950's. They were later published in *New Directions 19* with a note identifying Wang, improbably, as a direct descendent of Wang Wei. Mariani mentions him twice in the biography (dropping the David and spelling Rafael two ways): a passing reference, and later a paragraph describing Wang's visits to Williams and their collaboration. He cites a Williams letter to Wang on the beauty of Chinese poetry.

All very nice. Then I happened to come across David Rattray's marvelous article, "Weekend with Ezra Pound," published in *The Nation* in 1957, an account of a visit to St. Elizabeths. Pound mentions Wang, and Rattray knows him—as America's only Chinese white supremacist. It seems that Wang at the time was going around the country setting up branches of the White Citizens Council on college campuses. [Pound shows Rattray a letter from Wang, "filled with phrases such as 'the Cause which alone keeps body and soul together in this horrible city where all stinks of Jewry.'" Pound remarks: "Remarkably sensitive to the language for a young Chink."]

I checked back to Torrey, who, when it comes to anything nasty, never misses a trick. There, naturally, were a few sentences I'd overlooked about Wang, who is further identified as having organized the "North American Citizens for the Constitution," which demanded that Eisenhower and the Supreme Court be tried for treason. (In the same paragraph Pound is telling the young James Dickey he should join the Ku Klux Klan.)

Wang himself, of course, signifies nothing—at most he is a bizarre footnote to the "invention of China." What interests me, however, is that not only Pound (from whom we expect such things) but Williams and others were not merely tolerating, but working with people like Wang (and so many others) in the 1950's—regardless of the daily reports of segregationist violence. That is, although Williams (unlike Pound) probably disagreed with Wang, racism and political fanaticism were still considered as minor peccadilloes to be excused in the Artist.

What interests me is not that, after the war, after the publication of the Dachau photographs, E.E. Cummings was still writing poetry like this:

> a kike is the most dangerous
> machine as yet invented
> by even yankee ingenu
> ity (out of a jew a few
> dead dollars and some twisted laws)
> it comes both prigged and canted
> (*Xaipe*, 1950)

but that the Oxford University Press (on both sides of the Atlantic) had no qualms about publishing it. [Their only objection, in fact, was to the original last three words of the poem: "pricked and cunted."] How

rarely did anyone along the publishing chain simply say no to the dissemination of these Fetid Asides of the Modern Masters.

American poetry will move into a (truly) post-modernist era, when we start thinking about why 20th century American poetry, *unlike the poetry of anywhere else,* was (and is) so often written out of hate. For what American poet did not publicly loathe at least one of the following: blacks, whites, Jews, Catholics, homosexuals, heterosexuals, women, men, the middle class, the poor, the rich? Is there an American poet whose biography one can read without embarrassment?

(Only a few...)

Where the European avant-garde was dismantling the received culture, their American counterparts—the orphaned children, ironically, of the 19th century's most radical poets, Dickinson and Whitman—were attempting to gather the live tradition from the air, to insert themselves into (European) literary history, to find historical validation. The American avant-garde was trying to become the next chapter of the Book of Western Culture—the book the European avant-garde was tossing in the river.

Fought on the same soil, the battlelines were quite different (the language of the avant-garde is always military). For the Europeans, it was a rebellion of the new art/anti-art against the old art; the enemy was culture, tradition, the academy, *art.* For the Americans, it was a struggle between art and the enemies of art, *people.* Typical European manifestoes would declare:

> Divert the canals to flood the museums! Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvasses bobbing adrift on those waters, discolored and shredded!
>
> (Marinetti)

> We should burn all libraries and allow to remain only that which every one knows by heart. A beautiful age of the legend would then begin...
>
> (Ball)

while Pound's rages were against those he perceived as "destroyers": usurers, Jews, the makers of World War I (whom he held responsible first for killing Gaudier-Brzeska and second the other millions), Taoists and Buddhists (whom he imagined to be hostile to Confucianism) and so on down an *enemies list* he ran for some seventy years.

The Americans exalted the Artist as creator of the new order (return to the old order) while simultaneously making tragic generalizations about those they considered to be obstacles to that new order: forces of

chaos, betrayers of art, outsiders to the tradition. Americans, more than anyone, bought the "unacknowledged legislator" (secret holder of the power) myth. And they still do. From Pound's conviction that he could prevent World War II after a short chat with Roosevelt, to Olson's belief that he could *instinctively* decipher the Mayan glyphs, to the more recent equations of poets with alchemists, Kabbalists, shamans, the rhetoric continues while the poems themselves, like snail darters and furbish lousewarts, have retreated to the backwaters of the nation.

The American modern: where traditional visible/audible structures became hidden organizing principles, public utterance became private memoranda and the ideal audience was, in Pound's formulation, 30 readers. [He even interrupts Canto 96 to declare: "One demands the right, now and again, to write for a few people with special interests and whose curiosity reaches into greater detail." *Now and again*—as though normally the radiant gists were cast to the masses.] The rest of the world might as well be the Second Baronet of Canto 28, who, espying the four folio volumes of Bayle's *Dictionnaire,* can only stammer: "Thass a funny lookin' buk . . . / Wu . . . wu . . . wot you goin' eh to do with ah . . . / . . . ah read-it?"

The rest of the world was all niggers and kikes—a metaphor that became literal. [Though naturally one or two chosen ones even from among these groups were allowed—a Zukofsky, say, whose toadying to Pound extended to anti-Semitic cracks . . . Eliot's famous line that "any large number of free-thinking Jews" is "undesirable" implies that, well yes, if it must, a *few* would be all right.] Today the cast of heroes and villains has changed, but can one say that the American poets' belief in themselves as an illuminati surrounded by darkness has abated?

There's been a great deal of largely unreadable prose on the "post-modern": who is, who isn't, what is and isn't. It is a taxonomy composed of exceptions because there is, as yet, no post-modern. There is only American modern, on its last roll, and European modern, played out. Much of the current obfuscation comes, I think, from a confusion of the two. Despite Pound's passing interest in Dada (though mainly in Picabia as Artist) and Williams' occasional flirtations with France-in-New-York, they have little in common. The European avant-garde, under a banner of "life as art," was particularly questioning the veneration of the art object and the idea of authorship (readymades, collages of disposable and found materials, automatic writing, found poetry, dream imagery). The Americans, under the banner "art as life," believed in cultural resto-

ration, purification of the language of the tribe (and purification of the tribe), a Confucian rectification of names, and an exaltation of object and maker. The Europeans happily trashed traditional prosody; whereas the Americans, performing a similar operation, always invented historically-based excuses—like the "ideogrammic method" or the "variable foot."

Moreover, the European avant-garde's credo of art as subversion, art as the enemy of the state, has appeared only once in America in this century, during the Vietnam War. (The revolutionary art of the 1930's in the end sought only to replace one state with another.) Today the notion is laughable when *every* poet (and magazine and book publisher) in the U.S. is a ward of the state and the university, and the avant-garde's wrath at the institutions is limited to grumbles over the comparatively small slice of the pie they are being served. Even more disastrous than this economic dependency is the fact that poets have stopped talking publicly about poetry, that they are allowing the professors to speak for them, or worse, speaking themselves, when they do speak, in the language of "comparative literature." Today, the more radical the poetry, the more academic, jargon-struck and convoluted the critical validation—much of it written by poets. American poetry has become a village with more anthropologists than Eskimos—a village where the Eskimos are making tourist art for their own consumption and can no longer tell a story without deconstructing their "belief system."

Curiously, the seeds of a European modern were here in America: Thoreau and Hawthorne and Melville casting off the dead skin of Europe to declare that history begins again, *here*; Dickinson, dismantling and transforming the English poetic; Whitman, the subversive, the new mind casting the new line—the poet whom the Europeans and Latin Americans embraced while the Americans nervously looked the other way. This flowering died, of course, when James shifted the literary capital of the U.S. to London, and Pound began the century's epic in the pseudo-archaic speech of pre-Raphaelite knights.

Since then, American poetry has taken us on raiding parties through most of Western (and some Eastern) history. Moving toward the end of the millenium, if not of the whole show, we have now, at the end of American modernism, reached the beginning of the present historical cycle. Here especially, in the pages of Eshleman's *Sulfur*, we stand in Lascaux and Altamira, gazing at the bridge between no-art and art. On our other side, perhaps, world's end, the other bridge: between art and

no memory of art—total post-modernism.

Octavio Paz has written that poetry is the secret religion of the 20th century, and politics its public religion. For American poets, the public religion is in ruin—we must be the only country today where few writers are ideologues, or even interested. As for the private religion, it continues to be composed of initiates and no public, strict hierarchies of the faithful, petrified canons (orthodox and heterodox versions), secret codes, symbols and texts. It is a religion that is two-thirds Masonic Temple and one-third Catholic Church, whose rival factions squabble behind the ponderous and forbidding walls of the sacred compound.

If an American post-modern is to occur, it will have to bring down this monolith and, like Hinduism, build shrines on every corner, honor a pantheon of thousands of gods with shifting attributes, celebrate a calendar full of festivals and as many rites as there are practitioners.

It will have to pull down the mausoleums and monuments, exhume the remains, and place the skulls of Pound, Williams, Eliot and all the rest on spikes at the gates of the city. That the citizens may look daily at the horror: these, the venerable ancestors, the monstrous poets, the magnificent poem-makers, architects of paradises, builders of infernos, collective source of a great power. The power that is in the poetry not the poet, the power that still radiates from the poems unnoticed while the priests examine the entrails of dead poets for signs.

For the next flowering will come from the ashes of the Poet: a pyre kindled by manuscripts, letters, interviews, deluxe editions, archives, "collectible" relics. A pyre heaped with personality cults, irony, self-reference, "self-kleptomania" (Tzara), I the confessor, I the reminiscer, I the windbag, I the reader.

The disappearance of the poet leading not to the "poem itself" (ahistorical, discrete, sanctified—like the Black Stone of Mecca) but a poetry written somewhere: product of place and time, yet a piece of local conversation spoken and heard in a universe of silence, a strange music coming over the water. Some of it, idiosyncratic voices attached to no particular bodies. Some, transparent voices elaborating idiosyncratic thought. Ideas *and* things: meditation and a new description of the world: *interesting* poetry.

Not to sever, at last, the link of signified and signifier, but the contrary: to move toward, never reaching, the mythic unity of the two—as in certain tribes, where to know the name of something is to possess it. A language recharged: not by souping up the synonyms, but rather through

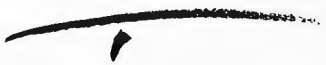
a hyper-referentiality, a recovering of the power of concentrated, musical speech. Mantra: magic. Centripetal melodies and centrifugal discourse: the world imploding into song *and* the poem spinning out into the world. A language not of dreams—surrealism without its political context has become whimsey—but of bedtime stories: unforgettable speech propelling into private reveries. The wisdom of the reveries impelling action. A poetry of spokesmen and witnesses, I and you, birds and stars, us in the cities: subversive, informative, erotic, pantheistic, cosmic.

For they now say that besides our sun, there is another sun. (They have named it *Nemesis,* and some even call it the *death star.*) Every 28 million years this other sun enters the Oort cloud, that frozen halo of comets on the edge of the solar system. And more: within the Oort cloud, they say there is another cloud, ten times as dense, ans this other cloud is the true source of comets.

This other sun, in its orbit, enters the cloud within the Oort cloud and pulls a billion comets loose; they scatter. For a million years, if one could watch from earth, the sky would be bright with a slow-moving fireworks of comets.

But some of them would strike the earth, and the dust thrown in the air by the impact would block out the sun for centuries. Little could survive such darkness, and little does. In the geological record, the book of earth, there are, every 28 million years, craters, a layer of dust, and the remains of mass extinction.

ELIOT WEINBERGER



Learned Ignorance and Other Defenses

1)

The function of the official literature—let's say, the literature which is sponsored by English departments, especially most creative writing programs, and the organs of literary journalism—is to choke intelligence with a kind of irreducible fluff, which absorbs attention in the

fascination of stimulus-response psychology. Staging meaning for an audience which has its abstract being in the realm of pure information, it is a spectator sport, which allows the enjoyment of empty opinion. Literary judgment leads to opinion-holding in its purest form, as it arises from the exercise of taste—i.e., opinion without content. Of course, literary judgment only *appears* to be without content. Literature and its institutions create the medium of believing and opinionating. Even ideology and morality become matters of taste, and we are expected to make contributions to the economy of opinion. The exchange of attitudes is as essential as the production and distribution of unneeded automobiles. Now, everyone with opinions is on the same side. The "production" of responses is the busy work of the spirit.

To hold opinions and to exchange them in witty repartee with other opinion-holders is satisfying to many people; it is a standard entertainment. For these purposes, however, certain kinds of poetry are favored. For example, A. R. Ammons and Mark Strand are ideal. Poets like Kenneth Irby or Clark Coolidge cannot be so easily appropriated. Irby and Coolidge make extraordinary demands on their own attentions. They do not participate in those institutions which make holding opinions a natural and safe state of affairs. Such writers—Gertrude Stein, Pound, Williams, H.D., Zukofsky, and Olson are the type—engage in life-long meditations. A reader can only join them, not in the current hip sense, in which the reader as an entity of critical politics becomes as oppressive as the author used to be, but just as a person who reads and addresses the bewilderment without preconception.

Jed Rasula, in "The Role of Critics and the Emperor's New Clothes in American Poetry" (*Sulfur*, 9, pp. 149-167), provides some important evidence concerning the opinion markets. His statistics give initial insight into the economics of opinion-making and the role of Helen Vendler, Rasula's chief example, as an opinion broker is clear.

Vendler is one of those relatively rare people who *likes* to read poetry, in the sense that many people like to read novels. Of course, she wants "a good read"—i.e., something that will engage the imagination, offer a field for the exercise of the sensibilities, pass the time, create topics for discussion with other poetry lovers, and, above all *to stay within the bounds of learned ignorance.* She is perfectly accurate; she finds exactly the poetry which she and her audience need and want. Her work and thought, like the work of most American critics, is unconsciously poised on a psychology of reading similar to the behaviorism of the

advertiser. The reader, in her scheme, is the receptor of stimuli, which the poets cunningly contrive in order to evoke intelligent response. Poetry, as she imagines it, arranges the iconographic detritus of the culture in a manageable display, so the composite response produces a certain exhibition of the cultivated man or woman. Although the product which is being promoted is always implicit, the poem is like the eagle or cougar in the car commercials. Vendler obviously has a confidence in her tastes, which allows her to seek out precisely those poets who can be used to give the elite a sense that "quality" is being maintained. This function, by which she gains access to the organs of literary journalism, is to provide opinions to people who have other important matters to think about (or who are just too lazy to think about anything more demanding than a page and half of Helen Vendler's prose). Irvin Ehrenpreis, in that remarkable passage Rasula quotes, at least has the honesty to admit preferring it to the poetry.

Now that I think about it, I too prefer her prose to most of the poetry she writes about. Perhaps she should dismiss the stable of poets which fate has given her and make-up her subjects. Meager stimuli is the only real limitation to her responses. I am sure she can imagine more interesting poets than Mark Strand and A.R. Ammons (though I doubt that she can do better than John Ashbery).

Vendler hasn't realized that there is no longer any reason to write poetry, and in this she is representative of more than a narrow academic group. Soon, no one will feel compelled to go to the likes of her to get their opinions about poetry in order: ignorance seems nearly secured. Soon, the government will stop supporting it, and the publishers will stop publishing it. I will be glad. It will eliminate a lot of confusion. In fact, getting rid of poetry is an essential clarification. Poetry's importance, as an institution, is that it provides evidence that there is a "culture," apart from mere consumerism.

Well, there is not. Fiction, theater, dance, painting, and so forth are clearly entertainments and decorations. Poetry and chamber music are the last remaining shreds of nineteenth-century cultural respectability, which was a sham when it was vigorous; it is just an embarrassment now.

That activity of speaking and writing which gives attention to the breath, to sequences of vowels, to scoring of words on a page, of the making of songs which are words, rather than songs which mangle words to fit abstract music, that activity, which concerned Whitman, Dickin-

son, Pound, Stein, H.D., Williams, Zukofsky, and Olson, is not a significant *cultural* activity. Even Pound, who so desperately wanted it to be, found out the hard way that it was not, and anyone who hasn't caught up with that fact by now, forty years later, is either a fool or, like any other business person, wants to get in on the last kill. I remember picking up a trade journal of the fishing industry in Gloucester a few years ago, and the advertisements for sophisticated new sonar machines read, "Get in on the Last Kill!" Vendler is on the last kill of American poetry. As a mode of vital intelligence for public use, it is more or less finished.

That *other* activity, which is still carried on in the name of poetry, consists of private acts of sorcery and destabilization; it is anti-social and anti-cultural, not Dadaist fashion, not with any particular reference to the "culture" at all, but by paying it no mind as any thing other than the actual threat to every one's life that it is. If it becomes widespread, the enforcers will be more likely to use the FBI, than someone like Helen Vendler to defuse it, but that is unlikely. Too few have the will and, given the way the economic demands drain people, the energy, to pursue the knowledge of their own song, except in the most casual sense.

2)

Like mathematics, the poetry of the modern West has been closely allied with technology. The dual and ultimately impossible task of poetry has been to maintain an impeccable formal purity, on one hand, and to articulate an interior living space on the other. No *medium,* however, almost by definition, contains the most intimate interior or the most sublime and terrifying otherness. We have substituted, in their places, "pure" art and shopping malls, the medium of spiritual peanut butter, this monotrop which embraces both the soul and the world. Despite its obvious ruthlessness, we have served its need to be embodied in intellectual disciplines as well as totalitarian leaders and totalitarian gods. Now we approach a perfection in which the replica is potentially self-sustaining. It no longer requires enforcement. The distractions it presents are absorbing and comfortable, hallucinogenic and pervasive.

We are in a time when the content of art and its cultural requirement are out of phase. It makes us miserable. Everyone secretly hates it. How many of our most sensitive readings of Homer are not sustained moans of suffering? Georg Lukacs speaks of "the adequacy of the deeds

to the soul's inner demand for greatness, for unfolding, for wholeness" that marks the Homeric confidence—an adequacy which is everywhere lacking in our world and in our efforts to produce such adequacy in art. Its beauty and rightness fill us with false hope, even as it reflects so plainly on our weakness, inadequacy, and hopelessness. Those who attempt to free us from its constraints by ridicule and laughter, like the Dadaists, only make more of it.

Against the objective creations of the technoculture, we have the subjectivity which is called into being by the poetry machine. John Ashbery's preeminence among contemporary poets is perhaps deserved: it has fallen to him to carry one of the most honored cultural strategies to its final extreme. In the seventeenth century, human subjectivity became the locus of a spatiotemporal metaphor and differences of perspective were accounted for ironically; it was a technique for the management of change and the resultant contradictions. Irony is the chief device by which subjective integrity has been preserved in the modern West. It is, however, ruled by a law of conservation: the degree of irony must be precisely adjusted to the degree of the threat it defends against. If it is heavy-handed, it is worthless. With Ashbery, as with Andy Warhol, the threat to the private preserve which bourgeois culture created in every soul is total, and it requires nothing less than total irony. After Ashbery it is possible, to continue along vague linguistic detours, which ultimately arrive at some unspecified equilibrium, but in time the journey itself becomes tedious, and so little vitality is left in the cliches and campy figures that it is hard to feel personally involved. One becomes a voyeur to one's most intimate processes.

Perhaps Andy Warhol understood this situation more fully than his colleagues in the other arts and, in effect, brought it to a premature conclusion. He exposed the bankruptcy of official art, while glorifying its institutions. He bracketed the entire process of producing and distributing art with his irony and turned it into a massive multidimensional work in which the paintings and prints are incidental products of the spectacle, which includes the frenetic activity of his studio, the gossip generated by his entourage, and the masterful manipulation of one of the world's most sophisticated audience. That Warhol's studio doubled as a discotheque reveals what has been increasingly apparent ever since World War I: art as a source of excitement now finds it difficult to compete with contentless technology (and drugs). What, after all, is a disco but a movie in which the audience becomes the actors? The basic technology—the strobe

light—is much the same: it pulverizes the time continuum and creates a series of stills, poses, postures, in which everything stops to reveal the perfection of the gesture. Warhol's "works," in the narrower sense of the word, are themselves gestures, fixed as paintings or prints or even movies. Turning movies into "stills," as in *Empire State* and *Sleep,* is one of the more cogent realizations of his essential insight. In the urgency of the relentless technological medium, the still image is transformed into a duration. And, of course, in busy times, they are superb substitutes for works of epic magnitude.

The Warhol phenomenon was capitalism's declaration of independence from the protestant ethic. It marked the end of bourgeois idealism and the beginning, not of bourgeois materialism, which emerged without noisy announcement early in this century, but of a desperate orgy of materialism in which art itself, the emblem of the subject, took its plunge into utter alienation. Warhol's medium is not so much paint or film as the self-consciousness of the art-consuming class. It is fitting that an artist, who began his career doing window displays for expensive department stores, should find his true calling in creating complete self-images for the consumer society's most perfect product—the sophisticated consumer. The moral ambiguity of Warhol's work is precisely the point. One of the maladjustments which was still hanging around from the origins of capitalism—a morality which prevented the people who made the money from enjoying it—had to be broken down. The cultural medium in which Warhol's ephemeral but expensive objects exist supports fully a reemergence of the romantic artist, ironically developed, so now the population can be manipulated not by a "hot" leader but a "cool" ad campaign. If there was a connection between high romantic art and totalitarian demagoguery, as seems likely, there is a connection likewise between Andy Warhol and government by image manipulation. The discourse of art and politics is now subliminal and shares a technology with avant-garde marketing. Warhol is a very important artist for having eloquently revealed this fact. One must ask, however, if any discourse is left in which this knowledge can usefully function. The rhetoric of both art and politics now precludes the grand gesture. Warhol and Kennedy were the boundary figures of the old style. Now it is all nickel and dime business, grubbing and mean-spirited. The poetry machine, which served as the generator of meanings and the guarantor of the soul, is now largely replaced by a universal electro-cultural medium.

3)

The attempts to sound the alarm that poetry in the sense which has persisted in the West, since the seventeenth century, if not since the time of Sappho and Archilochus, has disappeared are too late. Christopher Clausen, who is responsible for one of the more hysterical attempts to call poetry back to its Victorian order, in *The Place of Poetry,* sees science as the enemy: "Few doubt that the rise of science has had something to do with displacing [poetry] as a publicly important vehicle for those truths that people accept as being centrally important." Such was the case in the nineteenth century. Poetry, like religion, lacked the critical rigor which belonged to science, and confronted with the intimidation of scientific rhetoric, poets sought new pastures, where they would not be required to compete with positive knowledge.

In a well-known passage, Coleridge writes, "A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part."

In the later 19th century, life appears as a series of occasions of action and rest: science is for action, poetry for rest. In the structure of Victorian thought, poetry held roughly the same place as sentimentalized Christianity. It was a part of the technology, a way for exercising the feelings, while consigning them to a space where they could not interfere with serious concerns.

Neither of the nineteenth-century literary trends, which responded to the intimidation of science, were able to establish positions which could be maintained: one withdrew into palaces of art, where questions of truth could not be raised, and the other attempted to respond with an intimidation of its own. These were roughly, say, the positions of Mallarme and Matthew Arnold. Fear of the masses was a prime motive which united them. In either case, what came to be known as "culture"—a curious entity which *excludes* all of the social forms which involve work and material production—represented a realm of secular transcendence. It offered something of the relief of religion, without the embarrassment of belief.

In America, we never had a proper bourgeois culture. For the most part, the makers of American industry were barbarians right up to the time that corporate capital replaced them with a managerial system. It is

inevitable, therefore, that in an era of reaction, our literary elite should look back nostalgically to Victorian England and Palgrave's anthology for models of poetry's use. Palgrave represented the great abstract values—love, beauty, self-knowledge, reverence for nature—in short, all of those values which could stir the heart but for which there was little room in a rational society. Palgrave's anthology and the Bible were held in esteem as sources of authority for the sentimentality which was the stock and trade of the press, popular art, and fiction. The function of poetry was to ameliorate the harshness of a social order which was turning the family into a mere mechanism for consumption, creating the dirtiest and most unhealthy cities humankind had, to that time, managed to create, despoiling the earth by machines of ever increasing power, and exploiting the entire non-white population of the earth with its superior arms and modes of transportation.

Clausen continues to think of poetry as holding—at least potentially privileged, ameliorative position in relation to the objective activity of the culture: "Seven decades have now passed since the first rattling gunfire of the modernist revolution, a longer period than had then elapsed since the death of Wordsworth, and it is time to ask whether the kind of resue operation the Romantics performed for English poetry is possible again."

The answer to Clausen's question, if he means to ask for the renewal of that unified vision of the world, which informed the British empire (Clausen's military imagery is telling here) and the industrial revolution, is emphatically negative. That view in which the world is so simple that it can appear as the trope for the private emotional life cannot be sustained for the mass audience by poetry; it lacks force as propaganda. The maintenance of that *illusion* has become the business of mass media.

It would be better to speak not of the *disappearance* of poetry and the other arts in their bourgeois manifestations but of their transformation by media which are more efficient and more democratic. Poetry and the other high arts, to the extent that they survive, are adjuncts to television drama and rock and roll. Their *uses* in the culture are the same: they are entertainment for the most demanding audience, those who require greater complexity, which is to say, those who have more surplus attention to absorb.

We have persistent testimony that the pleasures of poetry are extreme. It is associated mythologically with intoxication and even the "pleasures" (read "happy irresponsibility") of madness. A performance

of Homer, from what we know of it, would likely have been more like a rock concert than a contemporary poetry reading. It can be said, of course, that Coleridge speaks of *profound* pleasures, of disinterested meditation or aesthetically distanced absorption in beauty, but defining "profound" necessarily brings the question back to truth. The readers Coleridge imagined were solitaries in their closets, books in hand, enjoying pleasures of the most cerebral and passive sort—such readers as have given up on the more overt pleasures, having subdued even the desire for them in the name of religion or the demeanor which was required in a protestant bourgeois culture. Nineteenth century philosophies of organism were controlled by a strict anti-hedonist morality for everyone but the artist, who was not only given wide license but was almost required to use it as a guarantee of authenticity.

The poets were allowed a holiday from the world of fact and addressed themselves to the imagination and the production of pleasure. They were honored adolescents and were licensed to speak of a world in which the parts added up to make a pleasurable picture of the whole. It was the poets' task to take responsibility for the emotional life of the people. They were, therefore, more or less required to lead scandalous lives (because "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom"? or simply because it takes a great deal of irresponsibility to counterbalance so much repression). Deviation from standard morality was not sanctioned, but it was forgiven as a necessary condition of the poet's office. If Byron is the exemplary case in English poetry, Rimbaud was most viciously victimized by the role, and it was Rimbaud who most clearly exposed it. At the age of college sophomores and as the author of enough poetry to make him immortal, Rimbaud quit: "I! I called myself a magician, an angel, free from all moral constraints... I am sent back to the soil to seek some obligation, to wrap gnarled reality in my arms! A peasant!"

While the nineteenth-century lacked an adequate technology for mass entertainment, the organic theory of art in a society which must finally value the self-indulgence of consumption as highly as the self-alienation of production, in order to maintain an expanding economy, fully justifies art as show business. By now, the Coleridgean artifact, which offers relief from the unpleasant, incoherent reality, and stimulates the pleasure centers, has been transformed into an integrated technological environment in which truth and pleasure are adjusted to an optimally efficient mix. Microcomputers, two-way television cables, and

video tape recorders and cameras, which are now being marketed for universal domestic use, will extend these possibilities democratically.

It is disconcerting to discover how many poets and critics still think of poetry as the generator of consumable sentiment or, among the avant-garde, consumable energies without content, and how deeply they resent the media which have come to fill the office of the poet which Rimbaud abdicated. Nevertheless, in a symposium in *The Georgia Review,* occasioned by the publication of Clausen's book, several of the respondents feel that television is the chief competitor for poetry's claim to the mass audience. Comparing the Leonard-Hearns fight on cable television and a poetry reading by Adrienne Rich, Maxine Kumin writes "Given the choice between an instant in sports and a lifetime in the arts, the mass-cult unhesitatingly chooses the hedonistic moment." And Joel Connaroe, Executive Director of the Modern Language Association, writes:

> There are, after all, an enormous number of diversions everywhere calculated to keep even serious readers from settling in with W.S. Merwin, Emily Dickinson, or any other artist who demands concentration and collaboration. The morning and evening news, *60 Minutes,* and *Wide World of Sports,* among others, provide constant enticements. What chance has Adrienne Rich against Rona Barrett? Anthony Hecht against Mike Wallace? Richard Wilbur writes like an angel, but is he a match for naughty John McEnroe.

An *"angel"? "naughty"?* Rimbaud's angel has come to this.

In response after response, the symposiasts degenerate into the self-parody of a fallen elite. The Victorian function of the Bible and Palgrave's anthology has been replaced by television, sports, and shopping malls, which are increasingly electronic amusement parks. The practical need for excitement and anesthesia to motivate and to ease the population through the boredom, frustration, and tension which is the experience of the citizens in a technoculture is immense.

The obligation, out of which one attends to the unspeakable sources of knowledge and makes, with never more than partial success, algorithms for their recovery, is given to deities which are not yet known.

The question of Rimbaud's obligation is still open.

DON BYRD

In this captioned photograph (or is it an illustrated poem?), we see blurred cars seen through a sharply-focused, rain-spattered window. The text has no direct connection to the picture: it tells a little anecdote about

FIRST VERSE: VISION IN REVERSE

It was the night flight from Houston- almost perfect visibility. You could see the lights from all the little Texas towns far below. I was sitting next to a fifty-two year old woman who had never been on a plane before. Her son had sent her a ticket and said, "Mom, you've raised ten kids, it's time you got on a plane."

She was sitting in the window seat, staring out. She kept talking about the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper, and pointing. Suddenly I realized she thought we were in Outer Space, looking down at the stars.

I said, "I think those lights down there are, you know, the lights from little towns."

a woman on her first plane ride, who mistakes the lights from the towns below for stars: "I realized," says the laconic narrator, "She thought we were in Outer Space."

Even a "documentary" photograph, Anderson's implies, cannot "capture" a particular experience: written text and photograph remain separate, delimited. Still, the juxtaposition here works because both deal with blurred vision, whether in the form of optical illusion (the photograph) or faulty logic (in the written text). It doesn't matter which came first, the photograph to be captioned or the text to be illustrated, for the "crossing" of the two exemplifies the way things actually happen in our world of communications technology. Such technology, as Craig Owens points out in his essay on Anderson called "Sex and Language: In Between," "is situated in between the emission (or encoding) of messages and their reception (or decoding), and as it has grown it has widened the gap between emission and reception to such an extent that today it is virtually guaranteed that no message will ever reach its destination intact." In such a "scramble system" (Anderson's own term), communication—a meaningful relationship between speakers—[is replaced by] the endless, relentless, *circulation* of signs, the circularity of a system closed in upon itself."

Owens' is one of four excellent essays in *Laurie Anderson: Works from 1969 to 1983,* an exhibition organized by Janet Kardon for the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art (October 15-December 4, 1983). The exhibition was also shown at UCLA's Frederick S. Wight Gallery (January 29-March 4, 1984), where I was one of thousands to see it; it is now at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston and concludes at the Queens Museum in Flushing, New York (July 1-September 9). The Anderson retrospective is a show one wishes anyone interested in poetry and the visual arts could see, and the catalogue (available from the ICA, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104 for $18.00) is at least a second-best.

It is impossible to categorize Laurie Anderson's art. She is usually called a "performance artist" (and lately—with some asperity—dismissed by certain artists as a mere "rock star"); the fact is that her work includes audio and video tapes, multimedia sound and visual room installations, photographs with text, drawings, collage, altered objects, and participatory sound sculpture. In all these works, language plays an important—perhaps the most important—part, her mode being to take absolutely ordinary materials—the photograph, say, of a waitress seen

from the angle of the person being waited on in a restaurant, the wholly ritualized discourse of the airline pilot ("Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seat belts . . ."), the outgoing and incoming message on the telephone answering machine—and to turn these ordinary language events into sometimes hilarious, sometimes bizarre, sometimes frightening pastiches. In their stubborn dailiness, Anderson's narratives recall Cage's little Zen stories, but their splicing and collage arrangements are closer to Burroughs (who appears with Anderson on her new recording, "Sharkey's Day"), and the relation of word to visual image on the one hand and to art-rock and electronic-organ washes on the other is finally Laurie Anderson's own.

It is impossible here to do more than urge *Sulfur* readers to familiarize themselves with such texts as "Converse Song #5,' (see figure 2).

If this "IT Song" suggests that there is no communication between the sexes (notice that we know nothing about the participants in this dialogue except their gender), the comic twist is that Laurie Anderson, with the help of the synthesizer that disguises her voice, identifies with neither the man nor the woman. She is, as Owens points out, less androgynous (displaying both male and female traits) than situated in a space in between the two sexes—in a realm, so to speak, of neither/nor. Moreover, in *Americans on the Move,* in which this song appears, Anderson's speech is accompanied by a telling gesture: she extends the violin bow to one side, moving it back and forth like a windshield wiper to form a screen. The "message" is thus intercepted by the process of art; it becomes Anderson's own.

In putting in question the very possibility of language communication, Laurie Anderson clearly has affinities with the Language poets, especially with such women poets as Lydia Davis, Lyn Hejinian, Rae Armentrout, Fanny Howe, and Kathleen Fraser. Fraser has just published a book called *Something (even human voices) in the foreground, a lake* (Berkeley: Kelsey St. Press, $6.25) that takes up some of the same issues we find in Laurie Anderson's performances, but here the mode is less that of collage than of fragmentation and frottage.

In Anderson, we usually know what we are looking at but we don't know what it means. In Fraser's new poems, objects, people, events are decomposed and realligned. The scene is evidently an Italian beach resort (Amalfi coast? Lido? Riviera?); there are at least two couples and an assortment of children; each prose poem has a hint of narrative (e.g., "Covertly, her husband ['s eyes]"). But what happens, what is seen is

figure 2

She said: Doesn't it look a lot like rain?
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: It's just kind of hard to say.
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: That's the way it goes.
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: It takes one to know one.
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said it, she said it to no one.

only partially illusionistic. One thinks of de Kooning or certain Diebenkorns. Here is "Anna ("Are you looking at me?"), if not," a title which challenges us to fill in the gaps:

> A lack of confidence stiffening this patch of hand over the body's bronzing. Abbronzato, working at it, and "Do you like it?" Her leg aside his arm. Arm against friends'. Galactic and childish in white while pulling at hem. Blinking little nipples before the keyhole drift where he lifts a path of white to display what is his little worry. All your hoarded blemishes could be big ones gathering a life (subcutaneous) against you. The man in red bikini buys you houses. You show your present, then he takes it away under that smile and a change of clothes. Turquoise bikini, rolling over from the day confirmed as yesterday. Neither headlines, nor even finer print. Looking for "ponentino" (little Western wind, to us), lifting your dress for them. She drifts in from bath in Hollywood white satin and already you are craving it, but you can buy anything and think it doesn't work. Working-out once, the glaze pulled back its gauzy robe. But you would not give what was yours much. (p. 6)

Is the "patch of hand" Anna's own or that of her friend or lover? The poem gathers erotic force as "he" (who?) "lifts a patch of white to display what is his little worry." Perhaps the husband worries his wife will get ugly sun spots on her white skin. Or perhaps he has other worries. Her "blinking little nipples" are subject to his "keyhole drift." The man is always referred to as "he" but the woman, whether Anna or the poet herself, is alternately "she" and "you." "You show your present," remarks the narrator, "then he takes it away under that smile and a change of clothes." Is the present the woman's body? Or is she carrying his baby, a more tangible present? The images are concrete but indeterminate: a turquoise bikini replaces the red one; newspapers are scanned, skirts lifted, "she" (another woman?) emerges from the bath "in Hollywood white satin." "The glaze pulled back its gauzy robe," an exhibition that produces envy to the point of "craving" from the other.

Fraser transforms her ordinary scene, a day at the beach, into something "if not," as the title puts it. Throughout her fragmented sentences, there is talk of buying and selling, giving and getting. But of what? Bodies are displayed, touched, longed for. But desire does not lead to communication: the colorful silhouettes remain separate; they have a hard edge.

Tadeus Nyczek has recently edited an anthology called *Humps & Wings, Polish Poetry Since '68* for Invisible City / Red Hill Press (San Francisco & Los Angeles; $5.00). On the face of it, nothing could be

more different from the "cool" and "hip" impersonality of Laurie Anderson or the aesthetic distancing of Kathleen Fraser than the *samizdat* political poetry of Krzysztof Karasek, Stanislaw Baranczak, Adam Zagajewski and other young poets of "the generation of '68." All the more interesting, then, that Stanislaw Baranczak, a former member of KOR, the Social Self-Defense Committee, whose works are banned in Poland and who was dismissed from his lectureship in the philology department at Adam Mickiewicz University (he is now a Professor of Slavic Literatures at Harvard) is quoted in *Humps & Wings* as saying that "language is a part of morality... for us the most interesting thing was not pure language but 'dirty' language, language spoiled and misused... that of mass media, of political speeches, of posters, things like that."

Mass media, political speeches, posters—perhaps it is impossible today for the poet to avoid such "dirty" or contaminated language. One of Laurie Anderson's recent songs plays upon the metaphor of the closed circuit; it is called "Let X = X" and it ends on this note:

> I got this postcard. And it read, it said:
> Dear Amigo—Dear Partner
> Listen, uh—I just want to say thanks. So... thanks.
> Thanks for all the presents. Thanks for introducing
> me to the Chief.
> Thanks for putting on the feedbag. Thanks for going all out.
> Thanks for showing me your Swiss Army knife.
> Oh and uh—
> Thanks for letting me autograph your cast.
> Hug and kisses. XXXXOOOO

But then the rhetoric of the macho thank-you note gives way to something quite different:

> Oh yeah, P.S.
> I feel—feel like—I am—in a burning building—and I gotta go.

The balloon of mindless cliches ("the Chief," "putting on the feedbag," "going all out") and contaminated idioms ("Hug and kisses") finally explodes, leaving us with the reality of the speaker's anxiety ("I feel like—I am—in a burning building"), a "reality" that is, paradoxically, just as inauthentic as the clichés that precede it. It is the space between such versions of the "real" that poets are currently navigating.

MARJORIE PERLOFF

The Egyptian Poems
BEVERLY DAHLEN
Afterword by Robert Duncan
Hipparchia Press, 1983.

Beverly Dahlen has been a major participant in the San Francisco poetry scene for well over 15 years now, and has likewise established herself within the more critically active circles of feminist poetics. Yet it would appear that she is virtually unheard of outside of these two contexts. This short set, eight poems exquisitely printed in an edition of 175 copies, retailing at a cost of $20, is unlikely to alter this circumstance, except insofar as it gives reviewers occasion to call attention to her rich, if neglected, *oeuvre.*

These are, she has said, her "last poems," in that, written in 1977, they directly precede *A Reading,* an "interminable work," much of it in prose. If it is understood as a journal, then *A Reading* is a composition conceived of on the scale of Thoreau's writings. If poetry, then an appropriate analogy might be *Leaves of Grass.* It is of course both and neither and more. In "Forbidden Knowledge," a talk given at 80 Langton Street, Dahlen credits Mark Linenthal with the advice that "art must be formal, contained, limited," which is the difference precisely between literature and writing. Even Ted Enslin constructs discrete works, however large or wide-ranging each might be. Charles Olson knew, somehow, which pieces were *not* Maximus poems, an intuitive boundary surrounding that project. Clark Coolidge set aside his untitled 1,000 page poem and Thomas Meyer destroyed his *Technographic Typography,* an 800 page teenage composition which attempted to tell everything, creating instead the short lyrics for which he is known. No one, in English at least, has ever truly written a fully open work, literally "interminable" and without limit. If one can judge from excerpts which have appeared in periodicals (most recently in *Ironwood 23*), Dahlen, in *A Reading,* has come closest. In the struggle between literature and writing, no one else has so clearly stood on the side of writing. (This is not to suggest that *A Reading* is without form or internal demarcations. The work is thoroughly sectioned. Yet, as in Creeley's *Pieces,* each span is that of one's attention.)

If *A Reading* would threaten literature, putting into question all of the issues of openness versus closure, *The Eyptian Poems* function as a series of attempts to name that which is unnameable, that vortex in which god, death, birth, absence and the unconscious are all one, or none. Reference is death, achieved only as one is born into the dead. Obviously, in an epoch with the likes of Lacan, Kristeva or Derrida, not to mention Bernstein or Hejinian, such themes are absolutely current. By placing them (or finding them) within the frames of Egyptian mythology, Dahlen is arguing not for their "timeless values" so much as for the persistence of this difficulty at the heart of naming.

Dahlen's style, here as elsewhere, is extremely spare. There is no waste, no embellishment. If the content focuses on the concerns of a particular literary community or generation, the rhetorical tone which she uses to unite these poems draws upon the scene in which she first came to maturity as an author:

> This is the god in whose body I walk
> in whom I stand upright
> the feet and legs of the god
> the moving phallus the womb
> the hair shaken over the brow
> the arms outstretched from star to star.

Neither Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan nor George Stanley could have composed this stanza, yet it could not have been written in a world in which their work did not exist.

Dahlen uniquely demonstrates the continuity between these two superficially dissimilar moments in writing, as I think will become more evident once a larger body of her work is available—this is only her third short book. But she is much more than a "bridge poet" between, say, Duncan and Bob Perelman. With Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Kathleen Fraser and a still relatively small number of other women poets, she has consciously demonstrated, as writer *and* critic, that modernism (or postmodernism) and feminism are not mutually exclusive. In so doing, she and they have initiated a reappraisal of the patriarchal hierarchies of literary tradition. It may be decades before any one of us comprehends just how thoroughly this investigation threatens (promises) to transform every assumption about writing we now hold.

RON SILLIMAN

Dear Jed,

Your article on Charles Stein (Sulfur 9) suggests a few observations concerning a possible American Buddhism.

Most of *Parts and Other Parts* revolves around a private series of rituals Stein engages in. These rituals involve the manipulation of a set of mana-charged objects. Photographs salted throughout the text show several of these objects: a Buddha, a Buddha-head, river-rounded stones, wrenches, gems, and various other items from Stein's private iconography. That Stein can be seen in cafes around Annandale and Reinbeck New York, diligently stacking his white stones atop each other in an outstretched hand, reveals the pertinence of the rituals for him. And, as you point out, his submersion of personality in "stone." In terms of Buddhism however these activities have to be assigned a rather insignificant role. They are vaguely familiar to anyone who's observed something of tantric Buddhism—known in Tibet as Vajrayana, and in Japan as Shingon. Tibet is a special case, and the magical elements creep in via the indigenous Bönpo religion which Buddhism never wholly displaced. As for Shingon, it represents an extreme fringe of Japanese Buddhism. Buddhism in Japan is almost wholly devotional, though acutely influenced culturally by the contemplative tradition of Zen. In almost all manifestations of Buddhism magic and occult ritualizations are eschewed as uninteresting and unproductive. In this way Buddhism can mesh rather neatly with Yankee scepticism—best publicized in its pragmatic form by Gary Snyder. Snyder's own shamanism (drawn from other sources than Buddhism) does certainly make use of "power" instruments, but these derive their magical efficacy from their capability as tools. Where Stein observes in his wrenches what I'd call a surcharge of *mana*—you call it "fulminating reservoirs of potential"—and lays them forth as the hieroglyphics of a mythic language, Snyder discloses the magic in a wrench by cracking the nut on a differential and laying bare the spider-gear. I suspect an "original" American Buddhism will be hard-headed and practical. Vulnerable to hysteria as the population on our continent may be, an enduring fascination with magic and ritualized manipulations like Stein's only afflicts a very fringe element. Most manipulations are financial and not spiritual.

You're correct therefore in emphasizing Stein's "presence of mind," but it should be fairly dissociated from his personal oracular operations.

The other comment vis a vis Buddhism is this: Stein's vision strikes me as queerly self-contained. We're admitted to his private pantheon through his poems. While this in no way discredits his poetry, from a Buddhist perspective he would appear to be dallying at a stage known as "catching the ox by the tail."

Early in the history of Buddhism there occurred the split between those who said, we'll go it alone, and others who said, we're all in this together. Snyder's incessant political activity, or Whalen's fluid universe in which anybody and everybody drifts through the discourse, makes their work particularly buddhist since it invokes a thoroughly interconnected universe. I am not criticizing Stein's behavior, nor his poetry, but questioning its relevance for Buddhism which originates in the social sphere and regards *community* as the "hall of practice."

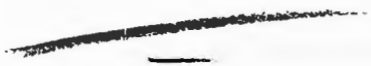
I realize Stein by publishing his poetry makes his contemplative acts public. But that is not Buddhism. The essential thrust of Buddhism is doubly transformational: personal and social together, and without distinction between the two. Pound, always far more the Buddhist than he'd admit, made the quintessential discrimination when he grumbled to his reader, "You who think you can get through Hell in a hurry." Namely, without bringing the rest of the tribe with you.

In the twentieth century the industrial ingenuity of our "tribe" has developed to a spiritually unproductive (though ecologically consequential) point. The construction of vast architectural monuments doesn't make for much awe in us anymore. Easter Island, Stonehenge, the Sphinx, stand at an end boundary of sorts, as *architectural* documents of a vision hauntingly *ourselves.* (Chartres, Ajanta, Borobodur are of a different order. They are quite evidently "translations" into stone of written documents.) Maybe something new is in making for the future—the bio-chip may or may not be part of it.

Between these two limits extends the period in which the *written document* stands as best evidence of a particularly human ingenuity and vision. Happily for those of us committed to letters, that time is for a while longer with us. I'd see in Charles Stein's writing, with all its eccentric ritualizations, a monument that may eventually resemble a native Stonehenge; or better, a part of our own landscape like the highly sophisticated rock circles found in New Mexico. We don't much understand the

Anasazi who used, then abandoned, them. But that in 1984 they refer some of us to ourselves is indisputable. They are haunting to wander through; their luminosity and self-contained secrecy "charms" you. These qualities will likely increase as the years pass, making our native monuments—and poetry like Stein's—a good place in which to locate configurations for a native self-definition. But the connection to Buddhism will remain tenuous.

ANDREW SCHELLING



The Graces
AARON SHURIN
Four Seasons, 1983.

Roland Barthes' preface to *A Lover's Discourse* could be appropriated nearly entire to indicate the emergent form of Aaron Shurin's new book, *The Graces*.

> The description of the lover's discourse has been replaced by its simulation, and to that discourse has been restored its fundamental person, the I, in order to stage an utterance, not an analysis.
>
> *Dis-cursus*—originally the action of running here and there, comings and goings, measures taken, 'plots and plans'...
>
> These fragments of discourse can be called *figures*.
>
> The figure is the lover at work.

While Barthes found it necessary to choose an "absolutely insignificant order" for his figures, in order "to discourage the temptation of meaning," the poet of *The Graces* is more like Barthes' description of young Werther; "... he is in love: he creates meaning, always and every-

where, out of nothing, and it is meaning which thrills him: he is in the crucible of meaning." The condition of being in love is the one in which men or women have not yet despaired of signification.

The three sections of the book are organized in this way: "Parallel Views" consists of nine more or less discrete parts; "Multiple Heart" is actually five short sets of seven, five, five, five and six parts, respectively; and "The Graces" is a series of 20 integrated parts.

These parts are not programmatic units, but measures of attention. They signal durations of similar activity in the writing. The interval of each part is, to borrow a phrase from Eigner, "the time taken to mean it." Through these parts move the *figures* which reflect a larger coherency and which are here constituted by emotion. Barthes' notion of *figures* is actually a timely restatement of Pound, circa 1915 ("Affirmations" in Selected Prose 1909-1965): "Intense emotion causes pattern to arise in the mind—if the mind is strong enough. Perhaps I should say, not pattern, but pattern-units, or units of design."

These figures required new larger, more open forms in which to work. "Parallel Views," with its prevalence of parallel structures, is written in the broken-line field arrangements of Shurin's previous work in *The Night Sun* and *Giving Up the Ghost,* but even here we hear the lines tensing to lengthen. Shurin's close reading of Whitman (Master's Thesis at New College in Poetics) alerted him to the projective power of a longer line. He rehearses the extension in "Parallel Views" until the line is cast out into the writing itself and so comes around to prose, finding its limits there.

The gradual lengthening of the line also effects an *acceleration.* Shurin himself (in a recent interview) speaks of running into prose to get up to the *speed* necessary to execute his "acrobatics and aerial feats." [Barthes—"The word (figures) is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptation; in short, in the Greek meaning; σχημα is not the 'schema,' but in a much livelier way, the body's gesture caught in action..." (*A Lover's Discourse,* p. 3, 4).]

With increased speed comes an enhanced ability to sustain a leap (a device or figure) over time, as well as a certain loss of 'control.' If one stumbles, one is likely to fall. In falling, one must rely on instinctual choices—what Frank O'Hara called going "on yr nerve." The writer's *intention* is overcome.

. . . without intention
with grace of necessity. I have this. I don't intend, I must.
(p. 30, *The Graces*)

As in acts of seduction we do (or do not) say "the right words" under force of necessity—when falling, there is no time to be wrong.

"I have a feeling that we 'fall in love' by a succession of word-codes." (Robert Duncan, in conversation)

To give an indication of the way these figures work, I'll briefly trace the movement of the figure of *falling* which reoccurs throughout *The Graces*. These lines open the book:

the water flows sweetly where the earth cowers
calls up a jug, an urn, a jig, a kilt
An Irish poet ponders a Greek vase
the water tumbles falls

This first fall is into memory. On the second page, the /f/ sound is anaphorically wound up: "folds, foals, follows, flows . . ." to punctuate the entire series as:

"a *facing* into the light
"*fine,* and then a little twist . . .
"*fourteen* Holstein cows . . .
"the scene is shaded by *first* light . . .
"don't tell, the well is *full* . . .
"*fried* clams &
"the *farmer* in the *form* of the cotton gin . . .
"a hundred *feet* up-cliff from the Pacific
"a very slice in the *flesh* . . .
"*fairly* beyond the wall.
"Draws into *focus* as congealing . . .
"and the *fork* is white . . .
"& the tongue *folded* over with color . . .
"So many little *philtres*
to separate the blend.
"raising *focus* on gauze
"blind*folded,* their eyes are blind
"*feathers*
& then the *feeling* of wind rushing by
"*For* every name we made a little movement of *foot*

The insistent phonological pre-patterning of "Parallel Views" prepares us for the opening of "Multiple Heart," where the figure is announced:

The figure of falling, falling forward, the figure kneeling, hands on dirty concrete, palms down, or the forehead touching grass. An agon of reconciliation: submission, the rapture of falling. Who captures you forewarned, a tongue's embrace, the wagon or welcome met for real, to fill you with what you failed to realize, the God grants the God mercy to pardon the God.

and continues:

Before the acquisition we had to dismantle the wall, which did not fall (as she said) nevertheless was hung with monstrosities.

then I saw that he was
lovely effortless in hairdo accidental slant of strands impeccable fall

It is this figure of falling which determines the movement, whether in its familiar melodic form or modulated into an harmonic phrase such as

> . . . the will to *forward*
> that, as it should be, determines exact
> juncture, fall of *foot, root,* wing or bone
> (p. 26)

picked up farther along as:

> Love shall be called forward called all,
> being now inside hegemony among each blushing
> word the truest touch of tongue's frail blessing
> (p. 29)

and

> Follow the fellow who follows the fall
> (p. 37)

The dominant figure of falling can also meet and recombine with other figures woven into the text, such as that of *sight*:

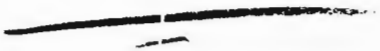
> bereave me, you fall, that like me down to nothing
> ground or grovel, where
> can such as we gain sight & rise . . .
> (p. 30)
>
> remainder indifferent to uplift eyes
> or gold leaves by goddess still fall
> Under the gaze of Watcher.
> (p. 35)
>
> the foreshortened delight of a face face to face with a face
> (p. 44)

signals the precision (foreshortening) that can only come in direct observation of the Other, the loved object, even if this turns out to be the language itself, and returns again & again to the primary figure,

> How the light changes, hour by hour, eye by eye, when
> contact keeps the form intact, and when light *falls*

The deft handling of these phonological and logopoeic urgencies, these figures, actually gives *The Graces* a greater degree of structural integrity than any of Shurin's previous work, without sacrificing the verve. Much of the pleasure, the exhilaration of reading this book comes from its aspiration, the risks it continues to take.

DAVID LEVI STRAUSS



The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi
The National Poetry Foundation
University of Main at Orono,
Orono, Maine, 1983.

Had I roused myself from the aureole of Michoacan and the pinball machine at Plaza Hamburger fifteen years ago in Madison, Wisconsin I could have walked down State Street, climbed the hill and studied with the visiting writer, Carl Rakosi. But in those days I knew everything so Rakosi might well have thrown me out of his class. One thing I did know, however—Rakosi was a modern; New Directions published him.

The Collected Prose of Carl Rakosi is not for brash tyros either. Apart from the reminiscences in the section entitled "Scenes From My Life" there is not much in the book for a kid that wouldn't run right by him. The heart and success of the book are in Rakosi's aphorisms, his pensées. One would have to live at least a little while to get at the resonance grounded in the authority of experience.

> "Individuality remains avant garde."

The world of letters, poetry in particular, remains no less caught up in the cliquishness, intellectual fads and mannerisms than was the case fifty years ago. So how fares the independent? If Rakosi were more predictable, clubbable and given to the right patter a collected poems would have been through several editions by now.

"What are old poets for? To keep young ones honest."

It's easy enough to be discomfited by some of his aphorisms, particularly those which challenge one's integrity and rigor through each step of a poem's process.

"Not enough distinction is made between metaphors which transform a subject into poetry and those in which a poet escapes from his subject."

***

"It takes extraordinary character to adhere at all times to sincerity, honesty, and discriminating particularity. There are reasons for this. One is the elevated expectations of writing itself. Another is the high rhetorical temperature of poetry. The third is ego."

One of the essential qualities of the poet and aphorist, one which distinguishes him from many of his compeers and juniors alike, is that of a life lived largely away from the academy, salon, and, for the most part, other poets. Is this salutary? Is this a qualitative distinction? Believe it, Virginia. A child in Berlin, raised in Kenosha, Wisconsin (and to remain a mid-westerner in his own eyes), Rakosi has lived and worked in Houston, New Orlenas, New York, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and, most recently, San Francisco—a wakeful eye among strangers, a worthy keel through a molten century.

There is much of the Magyar in Rakosi's earthiness, his good nose for what's in front of him, for what counts. He has the Jewish wryness, sense and vigilance for history, the playfulness with abstractions, and, now and again, a biblical cadence. He has remained, somehow, the European, the outlander fascinated by and enamored of the idea "America." He is, with his English contemporary Basil Bunting, among the most wordly of modern poets. This is delivered to us in what Elizabeth Hardwick, speaking of another poet, calls, "...the casual prose of poets, with its quick and dashing informality, its mastery of the sudden and offhand, the free and thrown away."

Carl Rakosi has been blessed with an astute and eloquent admirer in Burton Hatlen, whose afterward, along with an essay by Michael Heller

in Montemora #8, are the best pieces on the writer I've come across. The University of Maine, Orono (The NEA Foundation) will also be publishing Rakosi's *Collected Poems* in the near future. Maine has done a superb job with this book's production; Arline Thomson, the designer, is to be commended. The NEA with Carroll Terrell do handsome productions of Sagetrieb and Paideuma as well, not to mention their booklength tributes to Oppen and Bunting. Now, with the fifth series of Origin coming out of Orono, one can only envision the sort of frenzied, 24-hour-a-day industriousness of their neighbor to the south, L.L. Bean—lightbulbs burning in the forest night. Terrell and Hatlen are bears for good works.

Finally, a cautionary note: Rakosi is grouped with Zukofsky, Oppen and Reznikoff as an *Objectivist,* whatever that is. This is nonsense; he has nothing to do with them nor they with one another. Along with Bunting and Lorine Niedecker, they—Rakosi and the others—constitute a group of six of this century's finest poets, each of whom picked up something from Pound and Williams and ran like hell with it. The rest of it is for the professors, bless 'em. Read the book.

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

Oneirography: A Small Collection

> Writing is closest to dreaming, or at any rate
> closest to the literary conventions of oneirography,
> when it becomes predominantly descriptive.
> —Michel Beaujour

1.

I am at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association. As usual the sessions are being held in a large hotel. I attend various collo-

quia on different topics running from "Circumcision in New Guinea" to "Sociobiological Perspectives on Human Society" (in "The Thoroughbred Room") to "Problems in the History of Anthropology" (in "The Grand Ballroom" . . . where I give a paper to scattered listeners in a sea of empty chairs, unnerved throughout by the sound of my voice emerging too distinctly from a loudspeaker high up in the middle of the arched ceiling).

Crowds of people push past each other in the hallways, stopping, moving on. There is a constant sound of spoken English. At the end of the meeting on circumcision I overhear someone remark excitedly: "So if the nose is a penis, then the bleeding nose. . . ."

A session has been organized on "Shame and Guilt: New Perspectives." Seven speakers will be reporting from different corners of the world. The audience gathers in a large basement area of the hotel where spaces of varying shapes have been created, using movable partitions on rails. Ours is an intermediate-sized room ("The Waverly Lounge," flanked by the "Barnstable" and the "Astor"), carpeted in gold with blue walls ornately trimmed. Fixtures resembling crystal chandeliers shed an agreeably uniform light. Behind the speakers' table there is a multipaned window, each pane a mirror, framed by dark drapes.

While one of the speakers describes how Melanesian villagers responded to a man who, in a rage, had torn down a number of leaf houses, we hear, just behind the mirrored window, sounds of workmen calling to each other and the noise of a cart loaded with metal folding chairs being rolled down a passageway. Throughout the session, the speakers' remarks are punctuated by apparently random applause, and once laughter, from the two adjoining rooms.

The next-to-last participant, a graduate student from Papua New Guinea, rattles off a few sentences in Pidgin, apparently for the fun of it. (I can make out a few words—"blong," "likem" . . .) Then he proceeds with a somewhat technical analysis, speaking what he jokingly calls "cultural soap." Afterwards, all decide that the session has gone very well; there are animated conversations.

2.

One day I saw an infant of some three or four months fall, without apparent harm, from a low-hung cradle. Not pausing to feel the child's head for bumps, scrapes, or bruises, the mother took the infant to her

chest, spat at her forehead and chestbone, and in a soft, steady voice, called over its whimpers, "Come, little girl; come, come back here." The baby's heart, she explained to me later, did not "know" what had happened, and so needed her voice to prevent it from starting and jumping or fleeing in fright.

—from Michelle Rosaldo, *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life.*

3.

She: "Rendered vulnerable by conversation
they sat in silence
watching the tops of plants."

He: "Later on at poolside
a worker carefully watered the lawn
around them."

4.

The figure left of the multicolored radiant form is a man with starfish head, a bow apparently hanging from his hands. Fingers outstretched and of equal length suggest webs or rays. The woman opposite gestures similarly, arms and fingers extended toward the radiant center. Her head or hair describes five giant curls. All figures appear animate, outlined in sharp color, their insides containing discs blotches or wavy lines. The compositions are reminiscent of earthly landscapes viewed from outer space as an area of organs and tissues.

Now the two figures are placed at the right and left borders of the field and both have immense bent cockscomb scalps. The woman... assignments of gender are questionable... has pendulant breast-like appendages front and back. Three gold discs emerge from her lips in a wavy line. The other... male... appears to be looking into a fire. His insides are divided by two lightning-like red marks. Smokey waves rise from his mouth. The picture seems to represent communication.

The two figures here float free on a red field, their hair in combed lines seemingly blown outwards by astral or volcanic winds from a multifarious star balanced atop a mountain. It's hard not to see all the bright waves and discs emanating from their mouths as language or the picture as portraying some form of ecstasy.

A campfire composed of eight straight sticks and five twisting flames is set against the blue background. The forms hover . . . she with fingers spread, hair very long and vibrant, a curving yellow line inside her belly. He's floating nearby just over the fire . . . bright discs and waves emerge from his mouth as he holds onto a white bat or rod. Above her head discs scatter . . . white and gold.

—Huichol yarn painting, in four quadrants.

5.

The minarets that rise here and there are not like church spires. They are slender, but they do not taper; they are the same width top and bottom, and what matters is the platform in the sky from which the faithful are called to prayer. A minaret is more like a lighthouse, but with voice for a light.

—from Elias Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*

6.

A student of African ethno-history is conducting field research in Gabon. He is concerned with the Mpongwé, a coastal group who, in the nineteenth century, were active in contacts with European traders and colonists. The "tribe" still exists, in the region of Libreville, and the ethno-historian has arranged to interview the current Mpongwé chief about traditional life, religious ritual, etc. In preparation for the interview he consults a compendium of local custom compiled in the early twentieth century by a Gabonese Christian and pioneering ethnographer, the Abbé Raponda-Walker. Before meeting with the Mpongwé chief the researcher copies out a list of religious terms, institutions and concepts, recorded and defined by Raponda-Walker. The interview will follow this list, checking whether the customs persist, and if so, with what innovations. At first things go smoothly, with the Mpongwé authority providing descriptions and interpretations of the terms suggested, or else noting that a practice has been abandoned. After a time, however, when the researcher asks about a particular word, the chief seems uncertain, knits his brows. "Just a moment," he says cheerfully, and disappears into his house to return with a copy of Raponda-Walker's compendium. For the rest of the talk the book lies open on his lap.

APPENDIX: "Dream Stories Galore" by Raymond Queneau from *Contes et Propos* (1983)

I go to a mathematicians' lunch. The first guest to arrive carries a cello. Although we're in an urban neighborhood, we find ourselves in front of a stream where water lilies are growing. One of the mathematicians present points out how wrong Heraclitus was to say that we can never bathe twice in the same river: when we drink a glass of water surely a few of the H_2O molecules will have already passed through our body. The others agree.

I meet an Arab and tell him about the death of a Spanish worker of his acquaintance. He's not surprised, for the other man was working in a construction site where he had been hit in the head by an iron ball. I approach the nearby site: the Seine has overrun the foundations. They've had to cut off the water.

My sister-in-law returns some books I had lent her. I don't recall their titles. She drives a small car with an automatic shift and complains of rheumatism.

I'm in the country at a doctor's house. He cooks eggplants on a grill along with chops that catch fire: then he plays the lute.

A friend of mine has died. Another friend whom I haven't seen for some time approaches to kiss him on the forehead. A third asks me who a woman is who's present. I tell him: "That's the chief of production." He: "The wife of the chief of production?" "No," I tell him, "*the* chief of production." He goes and shakes her hand.

The butcher's wife writes me a letter asking that I leave the shutters Italian style. I wonder why, and what this means.

I find myself in a small city whose topography I don't know. I try to follow the same route I did the previous evening. But I take a chance on a narrow street whose houses seem to be abandoned. There's a hairdresser's shop with neither hairdresser nor customers. I wonder what he was thinking when he set up in a place so little "passed through." Leaving this little street I see a fat woman in pants walking a cat at the end of a long leash, accompanied by a Siberian lap dog.

I go into a church still adorned with a traditional altar. Posted on

the confessional is a piece of business stationery listing the members of the Brotherhood of Saint Rose. I read this carefully. Then I examine, no less carefully, the foot of a romanesque column decorated with a hare and a snail. Just as I'm leaving, a priest in a cassock enters. I ask him about the Brotherhood of Saint Rose. He gives me an explanation, but I've retained only a confused memory of what he said; as for the Brotherhood (it has to do with holy bread . . . masses performed . . .); as for the saint, he stresses that it's not a question of Saint Rose of Lima, but of a local saint.

A little later, I'm in an out of the way village. There is a church there, connected with the Hotel de Sens in Paris. The neighboring farmer has lent a key so we can visit. He arrives bare-chested accompanied by his wife in shorts. In front of us there's a pond; the ducks are going to sleep, for it's very late. The moon is just about full.

In a cafe I ask directions to the Chapel of Saint Baudel. No one has heard of it except the proprietress who tells me the way. I find it without difficulty. Inside, I see two boys, more or less naked, lying on mattresses; on the walls some Youth Brigade banners, but on the ceiling, well preserved, are the 16th-century paintings I was expecting to find.

In a totally deserted village, a peasant in the main square is trying to get up into the breeze a kite shaped like a parachute.

I have rented a house and I go out into the garden. I'm surprised to find a woman shelling peas. She's settled in a rocking chair. She says to me: "Come on over to our side." I stammer an apology and close the door again behind me.

I see a notice preserved under glass on top of a tomb. It's the discourse pronounced by a miller in 1896, a discourse he had printed: a eulogy of his mother, dead at the age of 82. He himself is the third of 18 children. The text contains the word "fatal," and others of the same sort.

I go into the neighboring church, restored with varnished, exposed beams and neon lighting. Two little gothic figures nonetheless remain.

I go out and find myself in the cemetery. They have brought together the tombs of the war dead. There are four of them. The crosses atop the tombs and the chains linking them are of a strange sort of forged iron.

I go and re-read the miller's discourse.

Some parents with their little girl are visiting Saint Benedict's. I look closely at the capitals while the father says to me (rather too familiarly): "Explain to her about the mass." I look at the girl. She must be about six. I ask: "Has she been raised a Christian?" I'm told, "No." I feel quite uncomfortable and keep silent while the father launches into explanations which the little girl listens to with round eyes. The mother smiles. She has brought some cakes: apparently they're good, at Saint Benedict on the Loire.

Seated in an outdoor cafe of a small provincial city, I look at the statue of a natural scientist and, even as the dusk turns into night, try to decipher the inscription on its pedestal. Suddenly, sirens. People come to their windows. Time elapses. Shutters close again. When the fire truck goes past, the curious have left. Then there emerges from the shadows a personage whose face reminds me of a confirmed alcoholic from Depot 24, during the Phoney War. He comes toward me and extends his hand, calling me teacher.

Naturally these are not real dreams, nor are they invented. They are just minor incidents from waking life. A minimal rhetorical effort seemed to me enough to give them an oneiric quality.

That is all I wanted to say.

JAMES CLIFFORD

Sun Poem
EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE
Oxford University Press, 1982.

"... political graffiti in Kingston walls seems to insist on spelling the name of Prime Minister Seaga as 'Ciaga.'"
—Caribbean Contact, *March 1984*

"I say Ree-gun, I don't say Ray-gun... because I'm a ex-slave."
—*Archie Shepp*

Edward Kamau Brathwaite's first trilogy was completed with the publication of *Islands* in 1969. *Islands* had been preceded by *Rights of Passage,* published in 1967, and *Masks,* published in 1968. The three books appeared as a single volume under the title *The Arrivants: A New*

World Trilogy in 1973. *Sun Poem* is the second book of a second trilogy, the first book of which, *Mother Poem,* appeared in 1977. In it, as in *Mother Poem,* Brathwaite continues the assignment he gave himself in "Vévé," the next-to-last poem in *Islands*: "So on this ground, / write." Following *Rights of Passage*'s diasporic meanderings in and out of Africa, the Americas and Europe, as well as the more focused look at Africa one gets in *Masks, Islands* initiated a return to and a more sustained exploration of "this ground," Brathwaite's native West Indies. *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* go even farther in this embrace of the local, dealing specifically with the topography and history of Barbados (the "mother" of *Mother Poem*), the island on which Brathwaite was born in 1930.

The front cover of *Sun Poem* carries a photo of the author at age 3 standing on a chair beside his father. Typical of the wordplay resorted to throughout the book, "sun" has to be also read as "son" (with a further overlay of the Spanish *son,* both "sound" and, more specifically, the Afro-Cuban song form). Weaving in and out of recollections from childhood and bits of family history, *Sun Poem* is Brathwaite's most explicitly personal work to date—a further sharpening of focus. A sharpening, not a narrowing, for it almost goes without saying that the work which precedes it widens, gives resonance to and deepens what might otherwise come across as "merely" personal. Almost, but not quite. So at several points Brathwaite says it:

> this was our vision of the ancient sun
>
> squatting upon the sandy redge of memories
> this crab knew ancient histories
> old harbour cartagena tenoctitlan half
>
> moon fort plantation grasses; re-
> leased its scrapers scuttled with us back
> to prisoned childhoods hintless of the world
>
> of banks and bombs now voiceless auction blocks
> but instincts fished for lay below the surface
> with held and shining breaths that dived us down to truth

The sonship *Sun Poem* sound is, then, the deepest. Though there's nothing new or especially remarkable about this it does need to be remembered.

What is remarkable, distinctive, even startling about *Sun Poem,*

what any reader will come away from it unable to forget, is its verbal texture, not only what's done with words but what's done *to* them. "Calibanization" Brathwaite calls it. As in *Mother Poem,* he makes more sustained use of West Indian patois than he did in *The Arrivants*:

> *then one is step back an tro dung e cap an comman*
> *touch dat*
>
> *but you isnt to look at de tro dung cap*
> *but get back position in de fowlcock eye.*

But what he's up to goes farther than a quaint adoption of dialect. Even in his use of "standard" English he takes his cue from the folk.

Brathwaite concludes "Vévé," the poem in *Islands* from which I quoted earlier, with the lines: "on this ground / on this broken ground." Dialect ("broken English") partakes of that ground. "Calibanization" insists that in folk speech English isn't so much broken as broken into, that a struggle for turf takes place in language. "It was in language," Brathwaite writes in *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica,* "that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master; and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled. Within the folk tradition, language was (and is) a creative act in itself." So in *Sun Poem* the weight of that larger history which gives personal history its resonances is alive and felt in as small a thing as the word. As in the anagrammatic "derangement" Shakespeare had recourse to in fashioning "Caliban" from "cannibal," the puns, malapropisms, odd spellings, neologisms and strained meanings Brathwaite resorts to speak of disturbances outside as well as inside the language, social distempers the word is made to carry.

That he turns "militia" into "malitia" is one small instance of this. As in this instance, most of his "calibanisms" underscore senses of malice and malaise, emphasize the hurt put on the land and the people by slavery, the plantation system and more recent forms of exploitation. The words partake of that hurt. It shows in the language both as referent and as a telling, fairly obvious misuse inflicted on language, the abuse which brings that referent more emphatically to light. So "the panes of his eyes" becomes "the pains of his eyes," "the games we played" becomes "the games we paid," "the future" becomes "the few- / ture." "Huts" become "hurts" and "hillsides" turn into "hillslides":

but those that drone their lorries all day up the sweating hill to the
factory of mister massa midas
those mindless arch

itects that cut the cane
that built their own hurts on the hillslide

Brathwaite's work increasingly avails itself of and takes part in a revolution of the word which has long been a part of West Indian folk culture, a reinvention of English of the sort one hears in Rasta speech, where "oppressor" gets replaced by "downpressor," "livicate" takes the place of "dedicate" and so forth.

But a revolution of the word can only be a beginning. It initiates a break while remaining overshadowed by the conditions it seeks to go beyond. The shadow such conditions cast makes for a brooding humor which straddles laughter and lament, allows no easy, unequivocal foothold in either. Oppositional speech is only partly oppositional. Cramp and impediment have to do with it as well. In *Sun Poem* we not only get the sorts of pointed, transparent wordplay quoted above, but something more opaque and more disconcerting, not yet resolved as to its tone or intent. Brathwaite revels in a sometimes dizzying mix of parody and pathos, embrace complicated by a sense of the bizarre and even bordering on embarrassment here and there. In "Return of the Sun," one of the strongest, most striking of the book's twelve sections, problematic romance is problematic speech. Esse, courted by Adam, sits in a tree and speaks with a lisp. Only a lengthy quote can do the section justice:

But yu still want to drive
it? / he

started not able to follow this sudden tack
in her mean

ing *my*
lorry she lisp

ered sitting down on the branch of the tree

he could see the promised land of her thighs as she sat with her
skirt like a cat
up her legs and the skin of her shiney and smooth and smelling of
duncks

tree/*yu*
lorry? he

still couldn't follow the swing of her feet in the sweet of the tree
like

yu this/
ter she told

him and before that bubble was bold in his head

uh lookin some/body to drive
it/yu

know a good drive/
er glitt

ering down from the bram
bles/the leaves of her bodice

sparkle from spangle to shadow to dark
in the hool of that muse/ical tree

an who gwine pay fuh de gas a/
dam asked her still try

ing to follow but fall
ing/*de gath!*

she cried *haee* clapping her hands together like shakshak

o this had her now she was happ/y o jeeesus shine she was happ/y he was talking her own langridge now and he had her he had her he had her/he thought she would fall from the heave/of the tree

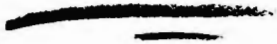
an inn yu gwine screw/off de cap a de bonnick yu thay yu is man and crank up de fan wid dat handle yu hand/le an pump/it she laughed him and then like wind with a cloud brings a sudden change to the canefields breathing grey where there once had been green esse say

yu theee/yu theee/ yu theee what uh thell yuh! dah is all yu ramgoats wantin wid we/pump yu gaths up de tank an is not even tanks like muh mutha say an aftha yu finish drive bout like yu like/oona gone back to town when yu dun an fuhget bout de bill when a accident come an de lorry dey pun de dump/ heap but lithen to me mith/ter john belly guts no/body int drive thith lill lorry yet showing him where it was in the tree *an no/body inn gettin no chance to -rit neida unleth they kin show me thuh lithunse*

Where else in contemporary poetry do we have anything like this?

Brathwaite helps impeded speech find its voice, somewhat the way Monk makes hesitation eloquent or the way a scatsinger makes inarticulacy speak. This places his work in the New World African tradition of troubled eloquence. Here, that is, trouble acts as a threshold. It registers a need for a new world and a new language to go along with it, a discontent with the world and the ways of speaking we already have. A revolution of the word, if it can only be a beginning, has to be the Beginning, "beating," as he has it on the last page of *Sun Poem,* "its genesis genesis genesis genesis / out of the stammering world." Bob Marley, asked in an interview how long he'd been singing, insisted on this very thing: "From Creation."

NATHANIEL MACKEY



Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse
STEPHEN FREDMAN
Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Maybe the problem with the prose poem is the problem of a Modern literature, one that has swallowed its structures and forms, made its closure and coherence not readily apparent, a bit of a mystery in fact. There's something endoskeletal about Modern literary works (novel, poem, or story): their identity draws from something inherently poetic, inherently fictional, not from a certain number of syllables, or a plot where "something happens." If—this being the case—the *verse* poem is a bit more obscure, drawing a bit closer to prose, occulting a strict boundary line between them, then what of the prose poem, which might like the poem to be a stable point so that it could define itself by opposition?

Stephen Fredman's book, *Poet's Prose,* is an attempt to deal with the perplexities of this deliberately ambiguous form. Typically a study in the prose poem (which Fredman would re-name, and a little too insistently, "poet's prose") attempts to fix its status by quantities: *this* much poetry, *this* much prose. Fredman is interested less in fixing the *poem* as

in puzzling the reasons why a poet would want to drop one of the remaining signs distinguishing poetry from prose: the self-conscious arrangement of lines and stanzas in the middle of the page, versus the anonymous and even spread of sentences in a little box with a notch. Why would a poet want to write sentences? A sentence implies a loss of potential, of point: the potential for guiding the reader's eye to a particular spot, to a particular word; the points of tension between syntactic and metrical stresses.

Baudelaire, of course, thought that to suppress verse form—to secretly write a poem, but disguise it as a paragraph—would be to gain a subtle kind of power over the unsuspecting reader, to have the poetic effects invade, as if silently. This prose would release a new kind of poetic substance in the poet as well because it was, as the famous dictum goes, "musical without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience."

Still, Baudelaire was interested in a *poetic* prose, whereas Fredman examines the poetic uses of a prose which, if anything, is strictly utilitarian, prosy, if not prosaic. William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, and John Ashbery—the main subjects of his book—were engaged in a project of releasing the poetic potential in prose, not in the possibility of writing poetry in a different format. At times, Fredman seems to be saying that prose has now *more* poetic potential than verse because the pedestrian "rhetoric of declaration and proposition" has a kind of inverse freshness as art. Certainly, prose has a different cadence, different patterns of tension and release, and the poet, in writing prose, can play on our recollection of the sound of facts, of argument, the sound of a court case, of a philosophical treatise, an insurance manual. John Ashbery's *Three Poems,* which Fredman discusses in a long and mostly interesting chapter, plays this prose music, teaching the reader how to hear the sheer sounds of argument, rationalization, prosings and pratings without being distracted by content, since the content, while entrancing enough and significant sounding, has all the graspability of a dream in motion. Ashbery himself, whom Fredman quotes liberally, has amusing things to say of this "content." In speaking of the late James and of Gertrude Stein—but certainly, by extension, of his own work—he acknowledges the "nearly physical pain" involved in trying to follow "the evolving thought in one of... (their) characters." Unreadability, even monotony offers a kind of pleasure in this work:

> Just as one may be depressed by reading the fine print in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* with long prose passages in eight point type, and feel as if one is drowning in a sea of unintelligible print—and yet this is one's favorite ocean, just as drowning is said to be delicious when one stops struggling, so I tried to reproduce that delicious sensation.

Monotony, likewise, has a kind of power:

> ... there is plenty of monotony in (Stein's Stanzas in Meditation) the 150-page poem... but it is the fertile kind, which generates excitement as water monotonously flowing over a dam generates electrical power.

Thes balloons of prose (150 *page* poem) are not, like "good" poetry, concise and economical in their verbiage. Their very beauty is, as Ashbery says, in saying "a very big thing in place of what might originally have been a much shorter and concise one." Fredman compares this "overflowing of meaning" to translation, borrowing Walter Benjamin's notion that the language of translation "envelopes its content like a royal robe with ample folds instead of fitting around the content like a skin." Is this the same as saying this prose is—as my mother would say, and contemptuously—wordy? Yes, but this "very big thing," or wordy thing is, as Fredman would say, more interesting. Why?

Partly because it evokes a kind of nostalgia for the verbose, the inappropriate, the ungainly in human utterance of most kinds: Ashbery works the cliché, and clichéd rhetoric for this kind of effect; perhaps, it's not exactly fair to say Williams was seeking to produce a nostalgia, but he certainly had a fondness for blunt, idiomatic speech and regarded it as a rich artistic material standing very nearly alone. However, if it is sheerly the novelty of a prose bracketed in some special way and seen as "art" which constitutes the appeal of poet's prose; if it is simply the sudden impact of a sentence—not a verse line—as a prosodic unit; if it is the revival of interest in writing a specially rhythmic or arhythmic prose which makes poet's prose worth paying attention to, that attention will flag when the novelty wears off. Fredman would say the very occurrence of a poet's prose is symptomatic of the "crisis" in American verse, and perhaps it will also pass away with that crisis (unless... American prose is a permanent crisis?).

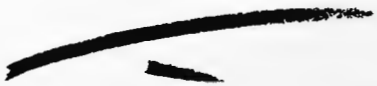
But, the very notion of "crisis" is vague, and a little stale; plus, Fredman is not in a position to measure that crisis, or prose poetry's place in it because he lacks an articulated theory of language. He mentions in his introduction that poet's prose enjoys a "sympathetic resonance" with the theoretical writings of structuralism and post-structural-

ism, but he doesn't bring any particular aspect of these theories to bear on his subject. (Roman Jakobson's work on the five functions of language, especially given the precision of some of these terms, would have been applicable, as would his syntactic analyses of poetry, to name just one example). It's not enough to say simply that recent literary theory and prose poetry are compatible; certainly, both would put in question the notion of a boundary between poetry and prose, or "literature" and other writings, but their ways of questioning are different, and their relationship to each other as discourses needs to be carefully rendered. Fredman tries for some alignment between Heidegger and Nietzsche and Robert Creeley, but the effort is largely a failure, partly because Nietzsche's own poet's prose so overwhelms Creeley's, but also because Fredman's approach lacks any rigor or precision.

Fredman's thinking very nearly amounts to: well, you could read Derrida and Ashbery on the same day and not feel troubled, or they might like each other if they met... or, doesn't this line remind you of someone?

Fredman seems to be a genuine enthusiast of prose poetry, and many of his local analyses are interesting examples of practical criticism, but this too brief, and much too careless study is not going to do much for the p.p. as it's listed in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics,* that secret, softly prosing—occasionally nattering—that fractious and insolent, fat and muscular, that perverse and deformed seed of an evil dice cup.

JEAN McGARRY



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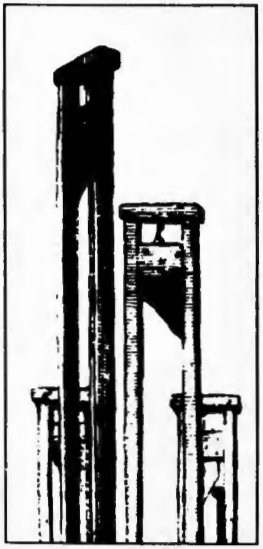

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